

Talking Points for Advocacy on Teaching Historical Truths in K-12 Curriculums
Racial Justice Arc Action Group
September 2021

All are concerned about the emotional well being of children.

Considerable alarm surrounds what is referred to as Critical Race Theory (CRT). Some parents/people are afraid that information about race and racism will be integrated into the K-12 public school curriculum and that it will cause their children to feel demeaned, guilty, or even consider themselves a racist. Other parents/people are concerned that this same curriculum is whitewashed and that none of the children learn what really happened; the truth has not been told. Parents/people of children of color are angry that the curriculum in K-12 has neglected race and racism for a very long time and the result has hurt their children: they feel invisible, inferior, and marginalized. Each of these groups is afraid children are being emotionally hurt.

However, as Dr. Michael Rice, Michigan State Superintendent of Schools told the State Board of Education on August 10, 2021:

Race and racism may be inconvenient for some, uncomfortable for others, and searing for still others, but, because they are inextricably a part of our history, **they must be taught**. I have confidence in our teachers to work through and teach these challenging issues to share the fullness and complexity of our history with our children.

In a democracy, ours included, an educated citizenry is necessary for our survival as a free people. If we lived under an authoritarian government, citizens would follow the orders of a dictator. We would not need to choose among options. But, in a democracy, ideally, we talk together about the important choices before us and reach a decision together. In order to reach effective and enduring decisions, it is important to base them on reliable information. The truths of our history need to be shared with our children so they have the knowledge to make wise civic decisions, decisions that promote the common good of the community or the nation. If they do not have this knowledge, the democracy which surrounds us all—
And protects such rights as free speech--will be eroded. The Founding Fathers felt education was so important, that they included the words which follow as part of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787: “. . . knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

Americans need to know the whole truth of our history in order to function in an increasingly diverse workplace and society. “In order to survive in this interconnected global village we must learn and learn very quickly to respect those who are different from us. . . .G. Lerner, 17.) The same is true for those who are members of different groups within American society. Everyone needs to know

what really happened in our collective past. It is not enough to cherry-pick the laudatory and heroic parts of our history; we also need to know the discriminatory and brutal aspects of it. This way, we can learn from the mistakes and help create a more inclusive, just society whose members can work together to solve complex problems such as poverty and climate change. “It is history, the known and ordered past, that enables us to delineate goals and visions for a communal future (G. Lerner 128).” President Theodore Roosevelt put it this way: “The more you know about the past, the better you are prepared for the future, President Theodore Roosevelt.”

Dr. Rice pointed to the U.S. Constitution and the Founding Father’s vision to **“form a more perfect union.”** He also pointed to “examples of historic actions to address racism and racial injustice, including the 13th amendment, which banned slavery, the 14th amendment, which granted citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the U.S., and the 15th amendment, which gave adult males the right to vote regardless of race.”

Rice continued: “Children today need to know our rich, marbled history and to consider its layers, its contradictions, its complexities. We teach history so we can learn from it. So as not to relive the tragic moments and to help **continue our inexorable progress as Americans to keep building a more perfect union.**”

Teachers deserve our support. Teachers are some of the most hardworking, unselfish, professional public servants in our society. They labor to prepare the next generation to manage their lives and to contribute to the well being of our nation. If they are being vigorously attacked by citizens or increasingly tightly constrained in what they are teaching, they can’t focus on their jobs, especially the needs of their students. The quality of students’ education—every student’s education-- is being damaged. “What we teach children is to respect each other, honor each other and our history (Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, July 6, 2021).” We need to support teachers.

Critical Race Theory- is a theory that university scholars use to explore race and racism in society and institutions. Its origin was in legal theory and the application of law, but it has also been used to investigate broadly in university level social science research.

Suggestion for talking with someone who opposes “CRT.” SURJ Training 8/25/2021.

Many people have various ideas about what CRT means. In a dialogue, it can be helpful to start by finding out what the other person means by the term.

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Sources for Talking Points – CRT

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Northwest Ordinance of 1787, Wikipedia.

Perez, Juan. “Fight for Honesty in Education” in ‘Weekly Education’ in “Politico.” 2021/07/06. Randi Weingarten, American Federation of Teachers.