

#TeachTruth: Don't censor honest accounts of history

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By

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State Republican Rep. Jim Walsh recently introduced [HB 1807](#) and Republican Rep. Brad Klippert introduced [HB 1886](#) for this legislative session — two bills designed to mandate educators lie to Washington's students about structural racism and sexism.

This copycat legislation is lifted from a [growing number of bills](#) around the country that seek to ban an honest account of history in K-12 education, including many of the long struggles against oppression. These bills especially target the teaching of critical race theory (CRT), the 1619 Project, the [Zinn Education Project](#) and [Black Lives Matter at School](#).

It's fitting that Rep. Klippert's bill is numbered "1886," as that was the year a mob of white people in Seattle [rounded up more than 200 Chinese people](#), forced them into wagons, and hauled them to Seattle docks where they were placed

on a ships and deported. Though 15 people were tried in court in relation to the riot — including [Chief of Police William Murphy](#) who helped the mob round up Chinese people illegally — not a single one was ever convicted of a crime.

It's similarly appropriate that Rep. Walsh's bill is numbered "1807" because this bill seeks to return us to the early 19th century — a time when the nation was accelerating the attack on Black people's rights in the North and colonizing the land of Native Americans. In 1807, New Jersey took away the right to vote for Black people. On April 1, 1807, Ohio [outlawed](#) Black people from testifying in cases with white people. For the next 40 years, white people could act with impunity in filing baseless lawsuits and commit crimes — even violent attacks — against Black people who could not testify to defend themselves or give any evidence against them.

In 1807, in our own Northwest region, David Thompson — a fur trader, surveyor and colonial settler — responded to Lewis and Clark with the first of several journeys that led him through the Columbia basin region for the North West Company. These missions by Thompson led him to establish trading posts on Indigenous land in Washington state, northwest Montana, Idaho and Western Canada. Thompson's contribution to the establishment of the fur trade in Washington played a crucial role in the

colonization of Native American lands.

HB 1807 and HB 1886 would seek to deny this very real history of structural racism that has lasting imprints on our society today. The irony is that HB 1807 and HB 1886, in their quest to ban critical race theory, confirm some of its central claims, including:

- Racism can be embedded in laws, even when they appear to use race-neutral language.
- Any progress in racial justice will be met with a white supremacist backlash.

HB 1886 states that educators would be banned from teaching that, "The United States is fundamentally or structurally racist or sexist." But consider these facts: The average white family has [10 times the amount of wealth](#) of the average Black family.

- A Black woman is [three times more likely to die](#) from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes than a white woman.
- Black students are [more than three times](#) more likely to be suspended from school than white students.
- The median household income for Native Americans was [60% of median white household income](#). And that was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent estimates reveal

inequities have worsened, especially for [Native American women](#).

- At least [44 transgender and gender nonconforming people](#) were violently killed in 2020, with Black transgender women accounting for two-thirds of total recorded deaths since 2013.
- Anti-Asian hate crimes [surged over 169%](#) last year.

You can either explain these facts as the result of Black, Indigenous and people of color being lazy, not caring about their future or being biologically inferior — or other such racist narratives — or you can explain that these disparities are a product of structural racism.

For teachers who believe in accurate history, there is no real choice here — we will always teach students about the reality of structural racism and other intersecting oppressions. Revealing these facts in the classroom is not about shaming white students — in fact, it is those who deny structural racism who end up leading white children to suspect that they are personally responsible for the racial disparities they see, rather than understanding the way systems can work to perpetuate inequities sometimes regardless of the intentions of the individuals who work in these systems.

We also want white students to learn about white people who have joined movements for racial justice and to learn that while there are privileges white people receive from being in a society with racist institutions, there would be more benefits to living in a society that treats everyone equitably.

Whether these bills pass or not, they are designed to rally forces that deny structural racism and create a chilling effect so that educators fear reprisals for helping youth become racially literate. Parents who believe in equity should help thaw that chilling effect by joining with educators to speak out against these bills and support the Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action (Jan. 31-Feb. 4).

Please believe that even if these bills pass, [many thousands of educators](#) like me in the #TeachTruth movement will never submit to mandates to lie to children.

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