

March 5, 2019

Dear Members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name Siobhan Carter-David and I am Associate Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University. I am from the Bronx, New York but currently live and am raising my family in Hamden. I support Bill 7082 and what the Students for Educational Justice (SEJ) are calling for, including their suggested amendments.

This bill is important to me because I was once a black girl who is now raising black children in this state. I also teach students in our state university system, and I see first-hand how the lack of knowledge amongst our young people coming into the college classroom from secondary school negatively skews their understanding of our nation's history. And the impact is dreadful.

I decided to become a professor of African American history because my 11th grade teacher taught history in such a way that diminished the struggles and contributions of African Americans in the country—a horrible thing to happen to students already fighting against poverty and disenfranchisement, which affected our self-esteem. In my bachelor's (at a historically black university), master's, and doctoral programs I learned more about the contributions that people of African descent have made to the U.S. economy, cultural legacy, and civil rights movements and have found clever ways to make this part of the story that I tell in my relevant undergraduate and graduate courses. Sometimes my students are challenged by this, as the stereotypes about black people perpetuated in the media and in age-old racist lore offsets the facts of African American history.

If students understood more about the facts of not just slavery, but also convict leasing; sexual assault and the vulnerability of black women; racialized police violence; lynching and the pushback against black autonomy; the inferior accommodations mandated by segregation; political disenfranchisement; red-lining; exclusion from labor unions; deindustrialization; unethical loan and banking practices; and the war against drugs and the resulting mass incarceration, it might be easier to understand the social, economic and political disparities impacting African Americans today. They would understand with less judgement and more compassion, while moving forward in crafting a more inclusive and equitable society.



Likewise, if students could be taught about the ingenuity of enslaved people; the perseverance of their descendants in their determination to get free and stay free; the contributions of African foodways to American cuisine; the contributions of blacks to the literary cannon; African American roles in scientific, technical, and medical advancements; the distinctively African and slave origins of much of American music; the sacrifices that were made so that immigrants and people of color from all over the could benefit from a more tolerant America; and the diversity of African American across time and place, then there would be more of a celebration of and respect for black life in this country. Students would be able to see blacks as a necessary part of the fabric of this country rather than a population to be simply tolerated with distain.

Furthermore, African American history is American history, and is has been since the beginnings of the British colonies in the early 17th century. This history belongs to all of us.

Thank you for your time,

Siobhan Carter-David

Siobhan Carter-David, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of History
Affiliate Faculty, Women's Studies Program
Southern Connecticut State University