

Education Committee

H.B. 7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum

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My name is Sally Grossman and I'm from Windsor. I strongly support H.B. 7082, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum.

I was born and raised in Windsor and went through the Windsor Public School System. There were many important aspects of Black history that I never learned in school.

There is Bessie Coleman, the first licensed African American female pilot, Phillis Wheatley, the first published African American author and Madam C.J. Walker, the first woman self-made millionaire.

There is Henrietta Lacks, a poor Black mother of 5 who died of cervical cancer at age 31 in 1951. Her cells, taken without her knowledge or consent, were instrumental in developing the polio vaccine and have been used extensively in medical research, including everything from leukemia and Parkinson's disease to human cloning. Despite Henrietta Lacks' immeasurable contribution to the medical community, her family have never been compensated.

Then there is Emmitt Till, who was killed after being falsely accused by a white woman of flirting. The woman's husband and her brother beat Till nearly to death, gouged his eyes, shot him in the head and threw him in a river. He was 14 years old. The two men were found not guilty by an all white jury. Despite the fact that the white woman admitted to fabricating the story, and is still alive today, she has never been held accountable.

Then there is Black Wall Street which occupied 35 square blocks in Tulsa, Oklahoma and was one of the most prominent African American communities in the country. In 1922, a white woman accused a Black teenager of touching her inappropriately in an elevator, which sparked a race riot as an angry mob of white people killed hundreds of Black Americans. Turpentine bombs were dropped from planes which turned Black Wall Street into nothing more than a pile of burning rubble.

Then there was the Tuskegee experiments, which involved studying how untreated syphilis effected Black men from 1932 to 1972, a span of 40 years. None of the 600 Black men involved in the experiment were told they had syphilis and none of them were treated for the disease even after penicillin became widely available. This study was conducted by the US Public Health Service.

Then there was redlining, which was the systemic denial of services to Black Americans starting in the 1930's. Banks were allowed to legally refuse investments in areas occupied by POC. The Federal Housing Administration, established in 1934, refused to insure mortgages in or near Black neighborhoods, denying Black Americans the ability to obtain a mortgage and own a home. The FHA also subsidized housing subdivisions for whites, with the explicit requirement that none of the homes be sold to African Americans. This also impacted Black veterans ability to access low-cost, low-interest loans through the GI Bill. Since most middle-class families in America acquire wealth through homeownership, and Black Americans were denied the ability to obtain a mortgage, this state-sponsored discriminatory practice during the mid 1900's continues to impact wealth inequality in communities of color today.

I could go on. Not only are the accomplishments of Black Americans excluded from history books, the horrors inflicted on Black Americans at the hands of white Americans and our government are barely discussed. How are children suppose to understand this country without being given an accurate history that hasn't been whitewashed and sanitized. What I learned in school was white history. It's time to teach Black history, and not just during Black history month. Thats why I urge the committee to support H.B. 7082.

Thank you.