

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

My name is Asti Jackson, I am a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine and a member of CONECT (Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut). I support House Bill 7082 with SEJ's amendments. This bill is important to me because as an African American woman educated by the public school system in this country, the lack of representation of the history of African Americans in the U.S. has impacted me in negative ways. This failure of the public school system to tell the history of this country in a holistic way inadvertently made me feel that "whiteness" was superior and that my place in this country was irrelevant. The "whitewashing" of history in the public school system leaves everyone ignorant to the truth of this country and more likely to repeat the heinous behavior of the past. I received my public school education in the conservative states of Georgia and Alabama. In Georgia, the focus of most black history education was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech which gives a narrow view of who Dr. King was and what he was fighting for. I honestly don't remember discussing African Americans in social studies when I attended 2nd and 3rd grade in Alabama, not even Dr. King. This isn't surprising for Alabama, given that MLK day in the state is also a day that honors Robert E. Lee, a U.S. confederate general. Unfortunately, my public school knowledge left me too ignorant to understand why this was problematic and racist. My true education of the history of this country began when I became a graduate student during the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. I took it upon myself to read books on the history of the African American experience in the States. I was shocked by the racism of this country and completely disgusted with the public school systems I had been a part of for not disclosing such vital truths. Even the bible addresses the importance of knowledge with a scripture that says: "my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge...". The incomplete history lessons taught in public schools have left and will continue to leave generations of Americans ignorant and powerless to make real change moving toward equitable conditions for all Americans.

Even though Connecticut is not a conservative southern state, the insufficient inclusion of African Americans in social studies classes exists here too. It is time for the state of Connecticut to take action. It is time to address the inadequacies of the public school system by requiring the history of race and racism in the United States in the CT curriculum, requiring racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators and creating a curriculum-building committee within the State Department of Education that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory, and students. It is the duty of the CT public school system to adequately prepare individuals for what they may encounter in the world and how to be a productive individual. But how can they do that if they are not adequately educated on the history of this country? Or on the role racism played in the formation of the U.S.? Or on the concepts of whiteness and anti-Blackness? The CT public school system will continue to leave people in the dark if CT continues to do business as usual. CT can set an example for our nation by teaching history holistically. And given the current political climate nationally and scandals involving blackface in Virginia's leadership, this country desperately needs it. African American history is American history. The inclusion of SEJ's amendments to HB-7082 will make sure this fact is known by all CT public school students.

Thank you for your time,

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