

Testimony of

**Jeff Leake, President
Connecticut Education Association**

Before the Education Committee

March 6th, 2019

Re: HB 7082: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM, & HB 7083: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF PUERTO RICAN AND LATINO STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM

CEA supports HB 7082 and HB 7083

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jeff Leake. I serve as the President of the Connecticut Education Association, which is the largest teachers' union in Connecticut, representing tens of thousands of active and retired teachers who inform our legislative priorities.

The Connecticut Education Association recognizes that the complex and diverse needs of Hispanic children require the direct involvement of Hispanic educators, parents/guardians, and community leaders in developing programs that meet the cultural, language, and learning characteristics of these children. We believe in the dissemination of information and programs that include the values, heritage, language, culture, and history of Hispanics.

The Association believes that the infusion of Black studies and/or Afrocentric curricula into the instructional program acknowledges the contributions of African Americans to history and Africa as an integral part of world history. The Association also believes that these curricula must show a correlation among social, historical, political, and economic developments and events regarding Africa, African-Americans, Europeans, and their descendants worldwide.

CEA wholeheartedly supports House Bills 7082 and 7083 and believes integrating the history and struggles of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos into the state's required curricula is long overdue. The history of these groups is tightly interwoven with U.S. history, but we have not given it the prominence it deserves. Here are some examples.

Shortly after emancipation and the end of the Civil War, roughly 2,000 black males held public office in South Carolina, and a Black man was on the Supreme Court of South Carolina. But these gains were short-lived.ⁱ Federal troops left the South about 12 years after the Civil War, and Blacks lost all the political gains they had made since emancipation. Then came Jim Crow laws in the South, which effectively kept Blacks from voting.ⁱⁱ It was not until the Civil Right Act of 1964 that Jim Crow laws were abolished and Blacks regained voting rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

The battleship *USS Maine*, anchored in Cuba's Havana Harbor in 1898, blew up. While there was no proof of what caused the explosion, the U.S. government used the event as an excuse go to war with Spain (i.e., the Spanish-American War).^{iv} The U.S. won the war and gained control of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines. It is now believed the ship most likely exploded because of how coal was stored, and not by a bomb. Today, we might say that the Spanish-American War was started using *fake news*.

These are only two of a multitude of important events in U.S. history that disproportionately affected Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos, and have been overlooked for less-noteworthy events.

After the hoped-for passage of these two bills, we hope to have the opportunity to work with the Connecticut Department of Education and other stakeholders in order to implement these measures.

We thank you for your time and interest and support.

ⁱ Foner, E. (2018, January 31). South Carolina's Forgotten Black Political Revolution. SLATE. Retrieved March 5, 2019, from <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/01/the-many-black-americans-who-held-public-office-during-reconstruction-in-southern-states-like-south-carolina.html>

ⁱⁱ Fremon, D. (2015). The Jim Crow Laws and Racism in American History. Enslow Publishing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Library of Congress. (n.d.). The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom. Retrieved March 5, 2019, from The Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/civil-rights-act-of-1964.html>

^{iv} Library of Congress. (2011, June 22). The World of 1898: The Spanish American War. Retrieved March 5, 2019, from The U.S. Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/intro.html>