

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: HB1256 Education - Discriminatory Concepts in Instruction - Prohibition (Ending Discrimination in Public Education Act of 2022)

FROM: Terri Collins-Green, LCSW-C

POSITION: Unfavorable

DATE: 3/8/2022

Dear Honorable Legislators,

HB 1256 Education – Discriminatory Concepts in Instruction –FOR the purpose of prohibiting a teacher, an administrator, or any other employee of a public school and certain nonpublic schools from including certain discriminatory concepts in a unit of instruction; and generally relating to prohibiting discriminatory concepts in instruction in public and nonpublic schools.

On March 10, 2022, the Maryland General Assembly will hold a hearing regarding the proposed HB1256 Education-Discriminatory Concepts in Instruction - Prohibition (Ending Discrimination in Public Education Act of 2022) which will essentially ban the teaching about the history of and reality of systemic racism, sexism and oppression of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) and ironically women, in this country as these would be regarded as “discriminatory concepts” that may cause “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress solely because of the individual’s race or sex.”

As a concerned, lifelong citizen of Maryland who attended primary and secondary schools in Carroll County, I know the pain of facing “discriminatory concepts” firsthand. Summer nights playing in my colored only neighborhood I heard passersby in their vehicles yelling “nigger” from their car window. In school while attending Sykesville Middle School, I was called a “nigger” by a white classmate. There was no law that protected me from “discriminatory concepts”. I question who exactly this bill is purporting to “protect.” Surely, it is not the BIPOC in this state who historically have not been shielded or even regarded enough by our educational system to garner this level of protection. In truth, my mother attended the last segregated high school (Robert Moton HS) to be closed in Carroll County.

Are we truly going to silence the truth, this is akin to the “burning of books” in Nazi Germany. In this bill there are eight areas of prohibition, under each area there is either validated research and or empirical evidence of the events that would be stricken from the “unit of instruction.”

(1) ONE RACE OR SEX IS INHERENTLY SUPERIOR TO ANOTHER RACE OR SEX;

Since the founding of this country, white Anglo-Saxon men made clear their “superiority” in both sex and race.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture published an article entitled, *Historical Foundations of Race* which cited, “European colonists’ use of the word “white” to refer to people who looked like themselves, grew to become entangled with the word “race” and “slave” in the American colonies in the mid-1660s. These elites created “races” of “savage” Indians, “subhuman” Africans, and

“white” men. The social inventions succeeded in uniting the white colonists, dispossessing and marginalizing native people, and permanently enslaving most African-descended people for generations. Tragically, American culture, from the very beginning, developed around the ideas of race and racism.”

White women had a hard fought battle to overcome the oppression of a white male power structure as documented in Mimi Yang’s, *An Intimate dialog between race and gender at Women’s Suffrage Centennial*:

“That was a historic moment when women took on a patriarchal power structure that had been in place against them in the United States. While all men are born equal in this great country, American women of all races have had to fight for the right to vote in order to be a full citizen and an equal human being. The patriarchal oppression takes countless forms across cultures and for millennia along human history. The basic and universal form is however the binary and gender hierarchy of male/female.” (Yang, 2020)

(2) AN INDIVIDUAL, BECAUSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL’S RACE OR SEX, IS INHERENTLY RACIST, SEXIST, OR OPPRESSIVE, WHETHER CONSCIOUSLY OR SUBCONSCIOUSLY;

Peggy McIntosh, Senior Research Scientist of the Wellesley Centers for Women and Founder of the National SEED Project originated her work entitled “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” in 1989 after studying the privilege that white men have in comparison to white women. She stated, “I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged... Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women’s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended.... After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious... I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence. “

(3) AN INDIVIDUAL SHOULD BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST OR RECEIVE ADVERSE TREATMENT SOLELY OR PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL’S RACE OR SEX;

Plessy v. Ferguson, Separate but Equal, ratified by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896 was the law of the land for 58 years before Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. “Colored Only” signs proliferated the U.S. from coast to coast fueling separate drinking fountains, restrooms, seating areas, and the invention of the famed “Green Book” in order for black Americans to safely find lodging and food during road trips.

During the era of the white suffrage fight for the voting rights, U.S. Congressmen stated about black people, “In 1919, just before the U.S. Senate voted on the 19th amendment, South Carolina Sen. Ellison Smith fulminated against what he called the “alien and unfit [Negro] race.”

(4) MEMBERS OF ONE RACE OR SEX CANNOT, AND SHOULD NOT, ATTEMPT TO TREAT OTHERS WITHOUT RESPECT TO RACE OR SEX;

White women were indiscriminately disrespected, invalidated and assaulted by white men when fighting for the right to vote in the 1920s. As documented in a Washington Post story, *Night of Terror: The suffragists who were beaten and tortured for seeking the vote*, November 10, 2017:

The 33 suffragists from the National Woman's Party had been arrested Nov. 10, 1917, while picketing outside the White House for the right to vote. The male guards at the Northern Virginia prison manacled the party's co-founder Lucy Burns by her hands to the bars above her cell and forced her to stand all night. Dorothy Day, who would later establish the Catholic Worker houses, had her arm twisted behind her back and was slammed twice over the back of an iron bench. The guards threw suffragist Dora Lewis into a dark cell and smashed her head against an iron bed, knocking her out. Lewis's cellmate, Alice Cosu, believing Lewis dead, suffered a heart attack and was denied medical care until the next morning.

Native American/First People Nations families were torn apart by the passage of the 1819 Indian Civilization Act which purposefully and strategically separated Native American children from their tribes because President James Monroe believed "if the US did not take control of Indian tribes and "civilize them", they would become extinct."

5) AN INDIVIDUAL'S MORAL CHARACTER IS NECESSARILY DETERMINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL'S RACE OR SEX;

Birth of a Nation (1915) by D.W. Griffith denigrated the moral character of black men. **Bell Curve (1994)** by Charles Murray reporting on racial differences in IQ and that Black people in the U.S score lower on average than white people. **SuperPredator (1996)** by John Dilulio perpetrated the myth of black adolescents who were a new breed of conscience-less teen killers.

(6) AN INDIVIDUAL, BECAUSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S RACE OR SEX, BEARS RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIONS COMMITTED IN THE PAST BY OTHER, INDIVIDUALS OF THE SAME RACE OR SEX;

The research is indisputable regarding the Historical and Intergenerational Traumas of Native American/First People Nations as per published findings from the American Psychiatric Association:

Historical trauma is the psychological effects of forced relocation, assimilation, and other traumas inflicted on Indigenous peoples linger today. Indigenous peoples are confronting the trauma, learning the accurate history, and reconnecting with Indigenous spiritual practices and culture to assist the healing journey—but continuing discrimination and ongoing trauma hinder that progress.

Intergenerational trauma is the intergenerational and unconscious grief from the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples is passed from generation to generation due to forced relocation, land dispossession, and loss of spiritual practices, language and culture. If not addressed and identified accurately, depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use can be outward manifestations of the intergenerational trauma and unresolved historical grief.

(7) AN INDIVIDUAL SHOULD FEEL DISCOMFORT, GUILT, ANGUISH, OR ANY OTHER FORM OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS SOLELY BECAUSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S RACE OR SEX; OR

From a social work practice standpoint this is the most egregious portion, and reflects ignorance of one of our most basic human emotional experiences of simply knowing when to say "I'm sorry". Brene Brown, one of the foremost researchers about emotional experiencing says: "What's interesting is guilt gets a really bad rap, but guilt is a very socially adaptive emotion, "Guilt is 'I did something bad', and shame is 'I am that.' "Guilt is cognitive dissonance. Guilt says, 'I've done something or failed to do something that is aligned with my values. And it feels awful. I need to make amends, make a change and hold myself accountable. I need to fix it.'" Guilt is the internal alarm that signals that we've done

something wrong and should at the very least acknowledge the wrong, either collectively or individually. This country has committed many injustices over decades which purportedly do not align with the 'values' of this country if we subscribe to Thomas Jefferson's ideal that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

Anguish should not be held in the same context as guilt. These are things that have caused me anguish: the horror of watching the murder of George Floyd and in reading, a passage in the book, *How the Word Is Passed* by Clint Smith, that a historical document from a slave plantation inventory found that a 29-year-old black woman was listed as a "good breeder" that in fact, "There's a job on the plantation that was 'good breeder.' She was a 'good breeder.' Had nine children in eleven years." David Margolick, writer of *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (2012) dedicated an entire book about the legacy of anguish, discomfort and psychological distress sparked by the famed 1957 photograph that captured the white girl, Hazel Bryan spewing racial epithets at the black girl, Elizabeth Eckford for integrating Little Rock High School. Quite, frankly BIPOC are and have been uncomfortable every day.

(8) MERITOCRACY OR SUCH TRAITS, SUCH AS HAVING A HARD WORK ETHIC, ARE RACIST OR SEXIST OR WERE CREATED BY MEMBERS OF A PARTICULAR RACE TO OPPRESS MEMBERS OF ANOTHER RACE.

BIPOC have since gaining their freedom after the Civil War engaged in meritocratic behaviors such as Black Wall Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which the massacre occurred in 1921. Here in Salisbury, Maryland, in 1930 the black neighborhood of Jersey Heights/Georgetown, a prominent, black business district was destroyed over time (Chavis, 2022) following the lynching of a black man. In both situations, black American citizens having gained some substantial economic success had that success destroyed at the hands of angry, white mobs.

In summary, I ask, why be an enemy of the truth, when we should be an ally for humanity? This bill has been strategically and artfully crafted to prohibit the discussion of any of these truths. What then will be taught about the histories of systemic racism, sexism and oppression to children who will grow up to be adults in the state of Maryland. How does absconding from the truth make us better human beings?

These wise and sage leaders should be our compasses in consideration for such a potentially detrimental bill. Frederick Douglas, a great abolitionist and orator who was in fact an escaped slave said, "The simplest truths often meet the sternest resistance and are slowest in getting general acceptance." The late, great John Lewis acknowledged that, "The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in the American society." The signs of a healthy democracy in which the idea is that all people are socially equal is that we honor the truth, and to move toward healing and understanding for all. Brene Brown from her website in promotion of her latest book, *Atlas of the Heart*, said, "If we want to find the way back to ourselves and one another, we need language and the grounded confidence to both tell our stories and to be stewards of the stories that we hear." And so, in closing I remind us all of the wisdom of President Abraham Lincoln who said, "Let us not cheat posterity out of the truth." and "The fact is truth is your truest friend, no matter what the circumstances are."

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Collins-Green, LCSW-C
Citizen of Maryland

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