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Banning Critical Race Theory

Teaching ‘systemic racism’ was imposed on students, until politics pushed back.



By

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An emerging reality of the current American presidency is that any normalcy Joe Biden may have promised was entirely fake.

The latest exhibit is the first anniversary of George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis occurring as about six states are enacting or planning restrictions on teaching what Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota are calling “critical race theory.”

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This was the sort of hyper-polarization Mr. Biden was supposed to arbitrate. Instead, he marches leftward, covering his trail with pixie-dust rhetoric.

As always, it defaults to the media to substitute its own explanations for the country's social tension. Two reporters for the New York Times connected the dots in a piece this week: "Republicans' attacks on critical race theory are in sync with the party's broad strategy to run on culture-war issues in the 2022 midterm elections." Little wonder so many say they are tuning out politics and the media. The reductionism is hopeless.

This new divide is a textbook example of the Founding Fathers' (if one may still cite them) fears about destructive political factions. "By a faction," James Madison wrote in his now constantly cited Federalist No. 10, he meant citizens "who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, *adversed to the rights of other citizens*" (emphasis added). We are there.

After last summer's protests, it was clear there would be a public reconsideration of racial issues in the U.S. Within six months, it was off the rails.

Parents of children at public and private schools across the country discovered that administrators, adopting the pre-Floyd arguments of the group Black Lives Matter, had changed the schools' curricula to give priority to racial issues. What many parents thought had begun as a good-faith discussion about race suddenly appeared to be an ideological fait accompli. No debate, no discussion. It just showed up.

Reactions erupted in, of all places, two liberal private schools in New York City—Dalton and Grace Church. An anonymous open letter from Dalton parents said, "Every class this year has had an obsessive focus on race and identity, 'racist cop' reenactments in science, 'decentering whiteness' in art class, learning about white supremacy and sexuality in health class."

Even at the most basic level of common sense (apologies again for the archaism), a parent might wonder: After the Covid pandemic's lost year of basic education, *this* is what you spent the time doing?

Critical race theory refers to an idea that emerged some 40 years ago in academia. The idea's originators, most famously the late Harvard Law professor Derrick Bell, argued that "race" infuses virtually every aspect of American social reality. The idea was as debatable then as it is now. Except that now, debate is dead.

The American Civil Liberties Union recently said state bans on critical race theory were efforts to "censor" or "silence" discussion about race in schools. Others call the laws a conservative version of cancel culture or "gaslighting" history.

Hold on a minute. Cancel culture is about the erasure of ideas, such as the obliteration of careers, books and speeches.

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It is chasing Charles Murray off a stage at Middlebury College in 2017, about the time opinion canceling began.

It is the editor in chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association being **forced out** this week for a comment on racism made by another JAMA editor in a since-deleted podcast.

It is **Facebook** banning opinion that says Covid may have begun in a Wuhan virology lab. It is Amazon banning books critical of transgender ideology.

The problem with progressives is that in pursuing their politics they always overreach. Then, after going too far, they cover themselves with bad-faith euphemisms. Proponents of race-based curricula say they simply want to have "conversations" about race. They don't want a conversation. Schools were *imposing* these novel views and eliminating traditional historical accounts.

Back to Madison and passions “adversed to the rights of other citizens.” A core goal of the American founding was to mitigate the imposition of ideas by factions without first running them through the democratic process. Such as elected school boards. With these beyond-debate, race-based ideological impositions on K-12 students, the left is risking dangerous divisions in U.S. society, not least a drift into a kind of psychological resegregation.

More practically, social division may be bad politics for the Democrats. Democratic political analyst Ruy Teixeira warned recently that these ideologized curricula “will generate a backlash among normie parents that the (Biden) administration is studiously ignoring.”

A “normie” is a person who is attached to established norms. Yes, they’re still out there.

Should students learn about slavery, lynching, Jim Crow or the Tulsa massacre? Yes. Should they be taught that “systemic” racism is the defining characteristic of America? No. If the proponents would agree to that distinction, there wouldn’t be a problem. But they won’t. Thus the state legislative bans—and a lesson in American politics.

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Correction

An earlier version misidentified Gov. Kristi Noem’s state.

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