

Statement on Critical Race Theory By

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While the arc of history may bend toward justice, the unfolding story of social change is often a series of fits and starts, a steady volley of progress and pushback. In the wake of the George Floyd killing a year ago, America embarked on a new chapter of introspection and dialogue around race and society. The pushback was inevitable, and it has come in the form of opposition to the teaching of critical race theory. Never mind that elementary and secondary schools do not, for the most part, teach critical race theory; there is political advantage to be had. Critics and some state legislatures have now bundled nearly every discussion involving race and equity under this heading and cast it as divisive, unpatriotic, and un-American. In fact, our schools have a moral and patriotic obligation to teach a balanced and comprehensive history of our nation, including events that others have hidden or conveniently avoided.

Education, by definition, should equip us with all the facts and information we need to form our own opinions and perspective. All the facts, not some of the facts. Not just the facts that make us proud. Otherwise, it is just indoctrination. The complete, unabridged story of American history is one of triumph and of tragedy, of great ingenuity and immense injustice, and we need to talk about both. That means that when we talk about race and our history, we need to not only celebrate the contributions of African Americans to music, sports, cuisine, language and literature, medicine, and business throughout the years, but also to explore the attitudes that led to hundreds of lynchings that occurred up to modern times. We need to highlight the contributions of Hispanic Americans to the agriculture, art, and aerospace industries, but include the study of the Melendez case (a precursor to *Brown vs. Board of Education*) and the systematic seizure of acreage and property from Mexican American landowners in Texas in the early twentieth century. We need to cover the contributions of the Navajo code talkers to winning World War II, and the horrors of the Trail of Tears and the systematic murder of the Osage for oil headrights. And it is as important to study the contributions of Chinese Americans to building the Transcontinental Railroad as understanding the racism behind the Chinese Exclusion Act. Our history is also not complete without an understanding of both the contributions of and oppression of peoples of differing faiths, gender orientations, disabilities, and languages.

If our history makes some people uncomfortable, then so be it. If some people need to be reminded that everyone was born equal and that no one is superior to anyone else, then let's remind them. If some people are surprised to learn that our culture and institutions, including our own schools, have advantaged some and disadvantaged others, then it's about time. This is not an unfortunate by-product—this is the purpose of education. And it is perhaps the most patriotic act

possible. Because if we believe that our children are heirs to a great nation that is striving to be better and more equitable, then we need to make sure that they understand both the history of that nation, and the important role they will play in determining its future. In our quest for a more perfect union, a great nation is not afraid of or threatened by this history or the discussion of it. On the contrary, it is our ongoing dialogue and steady—if not smooth—progress toward justice and equality that makes us great.