

The Culture Wars - Part Of The Effort To Reassert White Power In The U.S.
(by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

The culture wars are raging in this country. As if the current threats to democracy aren't sufficient to keep us active and afraid, these movements to ban books and restrict subjects in schools are troubling and cannot continue unopposed. These efforts, promoted especially by the white male base of the Republican Party, represent a reassertion of white power in the U.S. An appropriate slogan for this movement would be: "White Lives Matter More!"

In numerous states across the country, legislatures are passing laws and school boards are establishing policies that put in place many of the restrictions that are central to the culture wars. One of the most persistent themes of this movement is to question any teaching in Public Schools that might lead to a discussion of racism or other prejudices that exist or have been part of our history. The bogey man used by proponents of stripping curriculums of any discussions of racial prejudice is the term "Critical Race Theory."

Although scholars and reputable journalists have repeatedly reported that Critical Race Theory has only been taught in a few Law Schools and never in the Public Schools, the name provides a terrific foil for the advocates of removing any mention of race from U.S. classrooms. This scarcely taught theory holds that a population's views about race have a large impact on a country's economic, political and social structure. Although turning this thesis into an ideology may be questionable, it is hardly a revolutionary concept when looking at historical facts over time.



The advocates for removing any discussion of race from the classroom declare that students exposed to negative descriptions of slavery or Jim Crow will come away with negative views about their country. Worse still, they say, white students may have their feelings hurt by any negative portrayals of white behavior toward African-Americans or Native Americans. One response to this view is to ask: What about the feelings of African-American students? Do they deserve to have their heritage stripped from all textbooks? How are they to know the long and difficult journey from slavery to the election of President Obama?

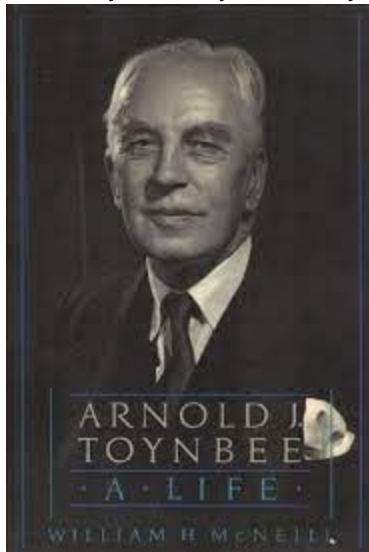
This writer started his working career teaching American history at Wilmington College in 1968. At that time, the history profession was under attack for not adequately narrating the experiences of African-Americans in the development of this country. What resulted were actual courses in Black History and a better attempt to integrate the African-American experience in general courses of U.S. history. At that time, there was not a white public or political outcry to this movement.

As someone who has always valued a comprehensive knowledge of history warts and all, I believe that we must mount an effective campaign against this white supremacist effort to water down or eliminate the black experience from U.S. History. The adage, "those who ignore history

are bound to repeat it," possesses a lot of truth. Our past is connected to who we are and what we stand for today, and this fact makes it important that we know both the good and the bad and the challenges and responses that the people of this country have experienced since its founding.

A history class that includes all of a country's struggles and its good and bad events and trends need not end up with students holding negative views about their country. If slavery was a stain on our history, look at all the heroes and heroines who need to be remembered from the Abolitionist Movement and the Underground Railroad. If Thomas Jefferson, a slave holder, penned the words "all men are created equal," this statement, nevertheless, served as an ideal that many people worked valiantly if imperfectly to achieve over the decades. These struggles, that finally ended with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or Women winning the right to vote in 1919, can give us all hope today in our current efforts to save and renew our democracy or to fight against the revival of white racism.

One way to study a country's history is to study its responses to the problems that it has faced



over time. Historian Arnold Toynbee is the architect of this approach that grades a country's rise or decline according to its successful or failed responses to the critical issues confronting it. Obviously, initiatives to erase racism or past responses to it from our educational process both deny this long term issue or any need to respond to it.

The current culture war raging across the country to eliminate racism and issues of race from our children's textbooks or from being discussed in classrooms is an initiative to create an alternative reality. It's the same type of alternative reality that portrays the January 6th insurrection as just a messy tour of the Capitol by well meaning Americans. Denying facts and creating alternative facts are central to the current erosion of our representative democracy and the efforts to renew white male supremacy. Thus, these culture wars and the initiatives to weaken political diversity and involvement must be countered if we hope to prevent our decline by failing to respond to the critical crises that confront us.