

Education in Response to Displays of American White Supremacy

Starting in the summer of 2020, the racial tension of the United States has been on display in the form of political and social unrest. Between May 25, the day George Floyd was murdered, and August 22, an estimated 7,750 Black Lives Matters protests took place in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Thousands of protestors took to the streets to protest police violence alongside discontent with the Trump administration and the tradition of white supremacy that dominates American politics and life. The 2020 Presidential election kept white supremacy and violence on the forefront of national attention. Activists like Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson issued warnings; “the South has been saying that white supremacists in elected positions is a dangerous and consequential matter that this country needs to pay attention to,” she said. The aftermath of the election and claims of unfair or a rigged election reached a pinnacle on January 6, 2021 when President Donald Trump’s speech spurred a crowd of self-proclaimed white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and Trump supporters to attack and vandalize the U.S. capitol building. With images broadcasted globally, the United States can no longer avoid its deep-seeded relationship with white violence and supremacy.

In many American institutions the question now becomes “what can be done to dismantle American racism?” The biggest battlegrounds are inside U.S. school systems from primary education to public and private universities. In 2019, a North Carolina School District made national news when it voted 7-1 to not require Black history education in its schools. Since then, students and teachers around the country have stepped up to request and implement anti-racist and Black history education into their schools’ curriculums. Students in Omaha helped spark an educational movement called Black History Matters and dozens of schools around the country got onboard. Now more than ever, previously resistant schools and higher education institutions are getting on board for anti-racist education. Some educators see this moment in American history as an opportunity to change the way we remember and the way history is taught. Eric Duncan, a policy analyst, wrote “The deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol earlier this month should be taught in social studies classes for many years to come... the way it’s taught will be a test of whether America can finally reckon with racism or if it will continue down the path it’s been on for centuries — a path where we simplify a story of racism in our country and repeat a pattern of behavior.” The current moment is one of change and for many educators it is a moment to define and change the way we educate American youth about white supremacy and racism.

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