

# Republican-led states enact fascistic laws that ban the teaching of “divisive concepts”

**Renae Cassimeda****21 June 2021**

In recent months, Republicans in nine states—Idaho, Oklahoma, Iowa, Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Montana, Utah and Georgia—have passed fascistic laws or other measures that ban the teaching of what they term “divisive concepts” related to racism and sexism in public school curricula and employee training programs, with some including social class among the topics that are banned.

Texas and Florida have explicitly banned the use of the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project in curricula, while Idaho, Montana and Florida have banned the use of critical race theory (CRT) in K-12 public schools and higher education.

Additionally, nine states have similar bills that have either been introduced or are already moving through legislatures, with bills in Michigan, Ohio and South Carolina also explicitly banning the use of CRT and the 1619 Project. Another seven states withdrew or deferred legislation on the topic earlier this year, with most set to be reintroduced later this year.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) unequivocally condemn these antidemocratic laws. As Marxists, we have fundamental disagreements with the theoretical foundations and historical claims of both CRT and the 1619 Project, but we oppose all efforts to censor them. Only under conditions in which all literature is made available for open debate and discussion can the historical and theoretical issues confronting students and workers be clarified.

The various state bills all use the same model legislation, entitled “The Partisanship Out of Civics Act” (POCA), written by Stanley Kurtz, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and education writer for the right-wing publication *National Review*. Each of the state bills includes specific language from Section B.6-7 of POCA, prohibiting the use of concepts related to “systemic racism or other like ideas.”

Kurtz’s explanation and defense of POCA, published in the *National Review*, notes that the act also adapted language from an executive order issued last year by Donald Trump, which banned CRT training for federal government

employees and contractors.

Most of the bills and laws do not explicitly refer to or ban CRT but rather ban the teaching of concepts associated with CRT. They can be interpreted by local and state officials as prohibiting a wide range of left-wing and progressive viewpoints. Teachers have already begun to be victimized for supposedly violating these laws, including in Tennessee and Oklahoma.

While large sections of the media have falsely presented these bills as centered solely on the banning of CRT, they, in fact, represent a sweeping attack on First Amendment rights, historical truth and public education.

The bill passed in Tennessee last month, arguably the most far-reaching, specifically targets the teaching of all social antagonisms, class conflict and revolution by prohibiting “promoting or advocating the violent overthrow of the United States government” and “promoting division between, or resentment of, a race, sex, religion, creed, nonviolent political affiliation, social class, or class of people.” Similar language has been included in the Kentucky, Maine, and now withdrawn Arkansas and South Dakota bills.

Wisconsin and South Carolina have proposed legislation that would require educators to publish their curriculum materials on school websites to allow for policing the content of educators’ lessons. The Tennessee and Arkansas laws, as well as proposed bills in Maine and Wisconsin, withhold state funding for schools that “knowingly violate the prohibitions,” and the Kentucky, Maine and Pennsylvania bills subject teachers who violate the law to disciplinary action and termination.

The use of Kurtz’s model legislation underscores the top-down character of this campaign, which involves the leadership of the Republican Party and its backers among the corporate and financial elite. Following the traditions of McCarthyism in the 1940s and 1950s, which sought to ban Marxist literature in the US as part of a broader assault on free speech, the Republicans aim to falsify history to promote a fascistic nationalist mythology at public

educational institutions and state government agencies. These right-wing lawmakers are part of the same party that attempted to carry out a coup on January 6 to install Trump as a presidential dictator.

In May, fascist strategist Steve Bannon stated on his podcast, “The path to save the nation is very simple—it’s going to go through the school boards.” A recent article in *NBC News* notes the role of “dark money” conservative forces pushing to overturn elected school boards, which is also being waged as a campaign against CRT to provide cover for a broader effort to install right-wing and far-right school board members in cities across the US.

There are now at least 165 local and national groups throughout the country that have carried out campaigns to recall school board members deemed too left-wing in at least 50 districts, with more recalls documented in the first six months of this year than the total for any other year on record. Many of these groups evolved out of the right-wing parents’ groups that pushed for schools to reopen at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Republicans’ fascistic attacks on public education have provoked enormous opposition among educators and parents, becoming the most frequent topic of discussion in the various Facebook groups where teachers are active. Teachers correctly see the recent legislation as a gag on what to teach as well as an erasure of history.

In response to a meme posted on CRT, one teacher noted: “While I would not debate this meme understand that we are being censored and that’s not a good thing.” Another commented that the Republicans aim “to limit academic freedom in order to appease a fascistic base” and “conform to a nativist, whitewashed curriculum reminiscent of the Hitler Youth.”

Additionally, over 70 scholarly and educational groups have signed a statement opposing the raft of right-wing legislation, noting that the bills “risk infringing on the right of faculty to teach and of students to learn” and that “a free and open society depends on the unrestricted pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.”

While most educators are not aware of the tenets or scope of critical race theory, officials in the Democratic Party, the teachers unions and the corporate media have responded to the right-wing attacks by defending and promoting CRT and the 1619 Project. In recent weeks, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, who sits on the Democratic National Committee (DNC), has endorsed CRT and the 1619 Project in multiple interviews.

In a recent interview with Joy Reid on MSNBC, Nikole Hannah-Jones, lead author of the 1619 Project, framed the Republicans’ laws entirely in racial terms, saying, “[t]hey are clearly designed to stoke white resentment, to really feed

into this narrative that white Americans are under attack, that they are the primary victims of racism.” She downplayed the severity of the measures, stating, “Even though the laws seem silly, I don’t think the emotions and the kind of real hysteria they’re intended to evoke is silly at all.”

Both Weingarten and Hannah-Jones, who speak for the Democratic Party, provide cover for the far-reaching attacks on democratic rights being carried out by the Republicans. Both remain silent on the threat of fascism and say nothing about the clear efforts to create a national patriotic mythology through historical falsification.

Weingarten and National Education Association (NEA) President Becky Pringle, who collectively represent roughly 4.7 million educators, have done nothing to mobilize the enormous opposition among teachers, parents and students to the antidemocratic measures being enacted or proposed in half of all US states.

In this, they are merely continuing their years-long policy of isolating teachers opposed to the broader assault on public education. This was expressed throughout the wave of teachers strikes in 2018-19, when the national teachers unions conspired with state officials to end each strike as quickly as possible, and even more sharply over the past year as they isolated every wildcat strike that broke out in opposition to the premature reopening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The national teachers unions, as well as their state and local affiliates, are corporatist bureaucracies embedded in the state apparatus. They fear above all any mobilization of educators and the working class fighting to defend public education and democratic rights.

Educators and all workers must organize independently of the unions, expanding the network of rank-and-file committees that have been established over the past year, to carry out the broadest possible struggle against the far-right attacks on free speech. Above all, it is necessary to break with both right-wing capitalist parties and fight to unite workers worldwide to overthrow capitalism and rebuild society on socialist foundations, in which democratic rights, decent living standards and high-quality public education are guaranteed to all.



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