

US College Board capitulates before Florida governor's attack on AP African American Studies curriculum

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On Wednesday February 1, the US College Board released its official curriculum framework for a new Advanced Placement (AP) course in African American Studies. The course framework has sparked national debate due to removal from an earlier draft aspects of the curriculum focused on critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, activism, queer and feminist thought, and reparations for slavery.

Last month, far-right Republican governor Ron DeSantis blocked the AP course from being taught in Florida schools, saying it violates the state's reactionary "Stop WOKE Act" which was signed into law last spring. Prohibiting the use of CRT and other "divisive concepts" in classrooms and workplaces, the law seeks to eliminate any teaching on historical struggles against racial and sexual discrimination and for social equality. The law codifies prior legislation Florida passed in 2021 to ban CRT, as well as the *New York Times*' 1619 Project in school curriculum.

In a January 12 letter to the College Board, the Florida Department of Education confirmed the state's rejection of the draft AP curriculum saying it "significantly lacks educational value." The letter also said the state would reconsider its rejection of the course if the College Board would "come back to the table with lawful, historically accurate content."

The College Board, a not-for-profit organization which runs the nation's AP program in addition to the SAT and other college preparation services, denied any influence of lawmakers on the alterations made to the final draft curriculum. An email sent out January 26 indicated that the course had been finalized in December 2022, and that it had "been shaped only by the input of experts and long-standing AP principles and practices."

Yet, revealingly, all topics and authors that the Florida Department of Education flagged as areas of concern in the prior curriculum draft have been removed from the finalized framework. Topics of study including concepts and authors promoting theories on race and gender such as "intersectionality," CRT, black queer studies, and the Movement for Black Lives have been removed.

Additionally, a topic on the "reparations movement," which has been removed from the curriculum, was criticized by the Florida Department of Education as only including resources that advocate for black reparations.

The new framework also added an optional final project topic on

"Black Conservatism."

Given the public debate and backlash to the banning of the course in Florida, the US College Board has since issued a public letter, dated February 11, listing their "mistakes in the rollout" of the course that they claim are "being exploited" by the Florida Department of Education and Governor DeSantis. The letter notes, "We deeply regret not immediately denouncing the Florida Department of Education's slander."

DeSantis has responded to the letter by threatening to eliminate entirely the College Board's AP classes from Florida schools. In a news conference held Monday, DeSantis noted that he has already taken up the issue with the state legislature and said, "So this College Board, like, nobody elected them. They are just kind of there providing service. There are probably other vendors who may be able to do the job as good or even a lot better."

The censorship of the AP African American Studies course in the state is part of a much broader attack by the far right on public education and democratic rights. Florida, with DeSantis, a prospective challenger to former president Donald Trump in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, at the helm, has become the epicenter.

This includes DeSantis' recent support of a joint-statement from the Florida College System Council of Presidents promising to "not fund or support any institutional practice, policy, or academic requirement that compels belief in critical race theory or related concepts."

Further, DeSantis recently appointed six new members to the board of trustees of the New College of Florida, including conservative figures such as Christopher Rufo, who has worked with right wing governors and lawmakers to enact anti-CRT legislation across the US. It is clear DeSantis is interested in converting the college into an ideological think-tank—like Hillsdale College in Michigan—to promote fascist ideas and indoctrination. Hillsdale College produced the "1776 Report" in 2019, which was promoted by the Trump Administration as a means to "restore patriotic education" in response to the 1619 Project.

In November, DeSantis endorsed 30 candidates for school boards. Twenty-five of his favorites won, securing conservative majorities in several school districts, and signaling a major escalation in the far right's attack against public education. The

sort of individuals now at work on these school boards is typified by Bridget Ziegler, who won re-election to the Sarasota County School Board. Ziegler has direct ties not only to state Republican party officials, but to the fascist Proud Boys. She is a founding member of Moms for Liberty, a “grassroots” front organization with deep ties to far-right media and school privatization efforts. Founded in 2021, Moms For Liberty fought against COVID-19 safety measures in schools, to censure school curriculum and victimize teachers in the name of “parental rights.”

Last spring, DeSantis oversaw the passage of anti-democratic, reactionary legislation that directly attacks educators, free speech and history education. In addition to the infamous “Stop WOKE act,” the ‘Parental Rights in Education Bill,’ HB 1557, enacted last year, prohibits lessons about sexual orientation or gender identity in the state’s primary schools.

Additionally, DeSantis signed into law the “Curriculum Transparency Bill,” HB 1467, which requires districts to make all books and instructional materials available to parents for review, and possible objection. The law also bans the use of CRT and Common Core in all instructional materials. After the bill was passed last year, state education officials banned 41 percent of textbooks in Florida schools for allegedly including topics on critical race theory and other race-related educational material.

In recent weeks, many librarians in Florida have cleared out their shelves due to censorship rules that threaten them with felony charges if their inventories contain identified books or instructional materials that have been prohibited.

Indicating a broader trend in far-right attacks against public education and democratic rights in the US, Florida is one of over a dozen states that have passed fascistic laws banning CRT and other “divisive concepts” in K12 public schools and higher education.

The heightened focus on school districts as major battlegrounds for the far right was showcased by former president Trump’s education policy plan, revealed last month as part of his 2024 presidential campaign. Trump’s diatribe vowed to implement deep attacks on public education by promoting school privatization, the establishment of a “parental bill of rights,” the removal of teacher tenure, and the cutting of funding for any district which promotes CRT or “race-based discrimination.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the fascistic attacks on public education and democratic rights by DeSantis and the Republican party. Notwithstanding our fundamental disagreement with the theoretical foundations and political aims of critical race theory, intersectionality, and other forms of identity politics, we reject their outright censorship in schools. The attack on these ideologies obscures the real target: teachers and especially working class youth, whom DeSantis and the Republicans aim to deprive of knowledge of actual history, society, and culture.

The Democratic Party’s response to DeSantis’ rejection of the AP course ignores these democratic and class issues. It instead doubles down on its advocacy of CRT and identity politics, calling on its supporters in the trade unions, academia, and among the pseudo-left to defend these toxic ideologies as fields of legitimate study.

For example, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president

Randi Weingarten, who is a member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and ardent promoter of US imperialism, tweeted “Too often politics interferes with education, which is exactly what DeSantis attempted here... stop the race baiting and let our high school students in Florida elect to take the AP African American studies course.”

In this manner, the Democrats disguise the essentially right-wing character of the various identity ideologies that are the stock-in-trade of the privileged upper middle class strata that is their base. In fact, those who promote identity politics, CRT and the 1619 Project play a critical role in strengthening the far right. Their insistence that race and gender are the determining forces that shape society, and their attack on the United States’ great democratic revolutions, the War of Independence and the Civil War, have allowed the Republican Party, absurdly, to posture as defenders of truthful history.

In the end, despite the appearance of a bitter conflict, the ideologies of both the far-right and of identity politics share a common commitment to burying the real driving force in history—class conflict. From the far-right this is done through censorship and the promotion of a fascistic nationalist mythology. Identity politics, on the other hand, falsifies history by claiming that one’s identity determines social class and that “whites,” particularly “white men” regardless of class, “benefit” from the oppression of their class brothers and sisters.

Both major parties, and their supporters, are hellbent on suppressing socialism. At the heart of the censorship and attacks on public education in Florida and across the US is the history of the class struggle and the threat of revolutionary upsurge of the working class today. It is significant in this regard that, in the context of pandemic, war, and the emergence of immense social struggles and strikes in the US and across the world, US Congress came together to solidify their alliance against the working class by passing a resolution, with overwhelming bipartisan support, entitled, “Denouncing the Horrors of Socialism.”

The resolution, which itself is an expression of historical falsification, is a fundamental attack on the working class and an indication that Congress is preparing a social counterrevolution. By endorsing this right-wing manifesto, the Democrats make clear that, while they are prepared to defend identity politics, they are more than ready to join hands with Republicans to suppress the working class.



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