

**December 4, 2024**

**Inspire a Reverence for American  
Liberty by Teaching the Full Story of  
America**

Testimony for the House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,  
Elementary, and Secondary Education.

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On September 12, 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the request of the New York Civil War Commission at the Centennial Celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. In his remarks in New York City, King emphasized that the document that started the long process of ridding America of slavery was actually inspired by the core principle of equality embedded in the country's founding document: "The Declaration of Independence proclaimed to a world, organized politically and spiritually around the concept of the inequality of man, that the dignity of human personality was inherent in man as a living being," King said. "The Emancipation Proclamation was the offspring of the Declaration of Independence. It was a constructive use of the force of law to uproot a social order which sought to separate liberty from a segment of humanity."

What King so eloquently revealed was that slavery, far from being a particular American atrocity, was an accepted, grotesque feature at the center of a world ordered around the normalcy of human bondage. Yet it was America's Enlightenment principles that allowed it to "uproot a social order" and liberate millions of enslaved people in recognition of their intrinsic and individual human dignity.

I share these words of Martin Luther King on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation because it serves as an example of how the teaching of African-American history is one and the same with the teaching of American history. The two are intertwined. As someone who has led public charter schools in low-income communities for the last fifteen years in the Bronx, I recognize the power of this historical anecdote as a teaching tool.

Curriculum that both acknowledges the horrors of slavery while also honoring the indispensable role of America's founding principles to ensure its eradication, is the kind of comprehensive and factual educational content that exemplifies the purpose of this hearing: the importance of curriculum that teaches America's founding, presents accurate information, and promotes civic virtue in a self-governing society.

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I submit my testimony today as a proud product of the New York City public school system kindergarten through 12th grade, and a graduate of Brooklyn Tech High School, Cornell University College of Engineering and Harvard Business School. I wear three hats:

- As Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, I have been working alongside Johns Hopkins University to develop a 30-lesson supplemental 9th grade curriculum that will be launched during the 2025-2026 school year focused on instilling agency -- the force of one's free will guided by moral discernment -- in our nation's youth.
- As Founder & CEO of [Vertex Partnership Academies](#), an International Baccalaureate public charter high school in the Bronx, I have witnessed the positive impact when a school's curriculum, rituals and culture are geared to deliver a virtues-based education. Vertex Partnership Academies is organized around the four cardinal virtues of Courage, Justice, Temperance, and Wisdom. These are called cardinal virtues (from Latin "cardo," which means "hinge") because they are the root virtues upon which all other standards of moral excellence depend. When normed and practiced regularly in a school, these individual behaviors then form the collective basis of a good society, a community that is self-governed by public virtue.
- As Senior Visiting Fellow at the Woodson Center, in 2020, I was proud to help launch a new initiative, led by primarily black activists, educators, and scholars, to [develop free K-12 lesson plans](#) based on the 10 "Woodson Principles" of competence, integrity, transparency, resilience, witness, innovation, inspiration, agency, access, and grace. The curriculum offers lessons on black excellence in the face of unimaginable adversity. Among such examples were the nearly 5,000 Rosenwald Schools built during the Jim Crow era that educated more than 700,000 Black children throughout 14 southern states. These Woodson Center lessons have now been downloaded more than 200,000 times and are now used by educators in all 50 states in private, charter, district, and parochial schools, after-school programs, home schools, and prison ministries. The Johns Hopkins University School of Education's Institute for Education Policy has released its

Social Studies Knowledge Map on the Woodson Center lessons. The evaluation awards high marks across the board, concluding that the curriculum "provides students with high-quality texts that represent multiple perspectives, as well as opportunities for discussion and inquiry." The report summarizes the lessons' potential: The curriculum "achieves high quality scores for nearly all its resources. This suggests that the materials used in each unit provide substantial information, offer the possibility of high impact for students, and contain a multitude of topics. The project also scores extremely well on the Institute's measure of Open Classroom Climate, indicating that it helps instructors encourage critical thinking and healthy discussion in the classroom. In addition, the project earns even higher ratings for its incorporation of multiple perspectives. This indicates the project purposefully addresses both tragedies and triumphs from America's past."

These efforts are necessary given the infusion of divisive ideologies throughout our education system, such as critical theory, which posits an oppressor versus oppressed framework based on identity groups in every American law and institution. Here are just five examples that I've highlighted over the last several years:

- I have shown that Critical Race Theory Distracts from Widespread Academic Underachievement. Framing American educational failure in terms of critical race theory or systemic racism alone ignores widespread academic achievement across racial categories. In 2022, only 33% of fourth graders of all races were at or above NAEP (the Nation's Report Card) reading proficiency. Only 36% were at or above NAEP math proficiency.
- I highlighted a teacher in Evanston, Illinois who has sued her district on the basis that "its race-conscious training, policies and curriculum violate federal law through conditioning individuals to see each other's skin color first and foremost, then pitting different racial groups against each other."
- I have called out curriculum like Reparations Math, produced by the discredited New York Times 1619 Project and the Pulitzer Center. This latter curriculum is designed to help students use math to estimate how much the US government

owes the black community -- a formula that perpetuates an ideology of black dependency.

- Research by Eric Kauffman, professor of politics at the University of London, [found](#) that reading even a brief passage from Ta-Nehisi Coates' "Letter to my Son" — which paints America as a nation built on a history of oppression —“was enough to reduce black respondents' sense of control over their lives.” And this lack of control can easily extend far beyond the classroom.
- And on November 25, 2024, a new study “[Instructing Animosity: How DEI pedagogy produces the hostile attribution bias](#),” was published by the Rutgers University Social Perception Lab and the Network Contagion Research Institute. It found that DEI training can produce hostile attribution bias, as well as increase division and hostility.

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A hopeful and upwardly mobile future for Americans of all races must be built on a shared understanding of our past that is accurate and expansive, not falsely embellished and narrowly selective (a serious flaw of the *New York Times's* 1619 Project). In each of my roles, I have seen the need for educators to be encouraged to impart a more complete telling of the American experiment, one that offers an empowering alternative to curricula that emphasize racial subjugation or American oppression to the exclusion of American resilience and ingenuity.

As King said on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation: “If our nation had done nothing more in its whole history than to create just two documents, its contribution to civilization would be imperishable. The first of these documents is the Declaration of Independence and the other is that which we are here to honor tonight, the Emancipation Proclamation. All tyrants, past, present, and future, are powerless to bury the truths in these declarations, no matter how extensive their legions, how vast their power, and how malignant their evil.”

Those who seek to teach a sanitized version of history to achieve some false sense of patriotic education do our country and students a disservice, and, ironically, so do those

who cherry-pick the most egregiously cruel acts to weave together a narrative of a permanent American malignancy of racism or other oppression. It is through exposing “all the truths in these declarations” that we can best teach about U.S. history in K–12 schools, and, as a dividend, perhaps we will also inspire a reverence for liberty and the American experiment.