

Facing History | Understanding the Historical Context for Educational Inequity with Dr. Jeffries

Well, hello, everybody who's joined us. Welcome to the Understanding the Historical Context for Educational Inequity with Dr. Jeffries. So excited about this time this afternoon, and I'll do more framing just shortly. But before we get started, we have a one-minute housekeeping video.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- Welcome to our professional learning webinar. Before we get started, we'd like to run through some important items to help you engage with the webinar. We invite you to join us on social media and tweet about this webinar using the hashtag #FHonline. Please select the Captions button to access the live captions of today's conversation. If you have any questions throughout the webinar, whether for our presenters or for our team, such as a technical issue, please use the Questions window. The most common technical issues are no sound or a frozen screen. If that happens, please try refreshing your browser.

You can also find the resources we will be discussing today in the resource list. Please feel free to access these resources at any time during the webinar. And now on to your facilitator. Thank you for joining us, and we hope that you enjoy the webinar.

[END PLAYBACK]

Well, hello again. I'm Dr. Steven Becton. I am just proud to serve as the chief officer of equity inclusion for the organization Facing History and Ourselves. And I'm especially excited by the over 170 educators who have joined us and who are now participating in the Teaching for Equity and Justice seminar. A special welcome to you, and I've heard so much about-- great things about your engagement already.

Momentarily, you'll be joined by Jamal Easley, a Cleveland-based program associate colleague of mine, and you'll also be assisted by the Director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion, Pam Donaldson. Jamal and Pam will be helping with introductions and the question-and-answer session. I'm just so excited to be here to stand with educators and community members. You're being here just denotes your commitment to education and equity and justice.

And I'm going to just remind you of our mission here at Facing History. It is to use the lessons of history to challenge teachers and educators, to stand up to all forms of bigotry and hatred, and to realize that ideal of a more perfect union. There is not any more important conversation in my regard to be in right now than a conversation about education equity and justice.

Just think for a minute. I want this simple statement to sit with you. Education is not neutral. Education is not neutral. Educators are not neutral. We are historical actors.

[PHONE RINGING]

So sorry. Let me turn this do not disturb on, which I thought was already there. So very sorry. Pardon that interruption. Let me see if I can get back to-- did you all lose me altogether? Somebody say something, because I'm not even sure if I'm-- no, I'm still here. I'm sorry. My computer was, I thought, was on do not disturb when I got it back. Pardon that interruption.

But as I was saying, education is not neutral. There is no more important time to be in this conversation. History has taught us that education can be used as a vehicle for equity, justice, and for bringing us together, or education can also be used as a powerful tool to divide. So it can bring us together. It can divide. It can promote equity and justice. It can promote inequity.

So it's important for us in this community, in this education community to stop and think, what does it mean in this moment we in to educate for equity and justice? This webinar and it's amazing speaker is going to help us via that conversation in a very historical and nuanced way. And I now pass it to my colleague, Jamal.

Thank you, Steve. We are really, really thankful that Dr. Jefferies is able to join us today for the Teaching for Equity and Justice Institute. He is a friend of Facing History and ally. He is no stranger to our work. He's led conversations around educational inequity, the fragility of democracy connecting reconstruction work, and understanding the current events and how these things are all connected.

Dr. Jefferies is a very exceptional scholar and historian and speaker. I can testify to that. He currently teaches at the Ohio State University as an associate professor of history, where he has been teaching courses on the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements. He is the author of *Bloody Lowndes, Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*, and the editor of *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, which won the 2020 James Harvey Robinson Prize from the American Historical Association for the most outstanding contribution to the teaching and learning of history in any field for public and educational purposes.

He also wrote and narrated the 10 episode Audible original series *Great Figures of the Civil Rights Movement*, which was released in February 2020. In the classroom, he's won several major teaching awards, including the Ohio State University Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching, the university's highest award for teaching. He's also worked on several public history projects, including serving as the lead historian for the five year, \$25 million renovation of the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

He is also the host of the podcast, which is really great, y'all should check it out. It's called *Teaching Hard History, American Slavery*, which is a production of the Teaching Tolerance Division of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Please help me in the chat box, welcome Dr. Hassan Jefferies.

Well, thank you very much, Jamal. It is an honor and a pleasure to be with you and to be able to share some thoughts and ideas with the Facing History community. I'm very much excited about this chance and this opportunity, as well as looking forward to the conversation after I share a few things, a few thoughts and ideas with everyone.

I am not in my usual place. I'm mobile. I'm flexible. I'm on the go today. I'm actually in Atlanta, Georgia at the National Civil and Human Rights Center, a wonderful center down here in Atlanta, Georgia, doing some work with some teachers in Georgia. And so I broke away from them. And I'm in a storage room.

But we got good Wi-Fi, they promised me. So we're going we're going to make it work. Please let me know if it gets a little glitchy on my end. And it may be. If so, I may need to change up a little bit. Hold on a second.

My tech folk could let me know if it's a little better. Please advise if it's a little better. And if so, I will-- Brother Becton, are we good? Is it a little stronger? OK. All right, fantastic. Fantastic.

So understanding the historical context for educational inequity-- the past is the present. In order to understand the ongoing educational inequity that we face today, it is important to look, not just at the last few years, not just at the last few decades, but really, at the history of education and public education as it relates to the American experience. And once we have a better understanding, or if we have a better understanding of that, then not only can we better make sense of the challenges that we face today, but we will be in a better position to come up with solutions that will actually address the issues going forward.

You can't begin to talk about and discuss the context for educational inequity without beginning and looking back at the history of education as it relates to African Americans in slavery. I mean, one of the things that we do as educators, and we do too quickly and too often, is we stop talking about slavery too quickly. We get to 1865, and we no longer talk about the institution of slavery because we don't talk about its legacy. We don't talk about its legacy.

Could someone advance the slide? I'm having a little trouble moving the slides forward. Won't quite let me push to the audience. I'm sure the team can hear me.

Dr. Jeffries, they can hear you. In the chat, they're saying that they would advance the slide if you can just say, next slide or--

Let's go next slide right now. That would be great.

Is this the one you want? It's on economics of freedom and sharecropping. That's what we see.

Oh, no, the very first slide after my-- I'm not showing that. The very first slide after-- 731, 731, slide 7. We'll do it by numbers. Slide 7, please.

I'm not seeing that preview. But if you could get slid 7, that'd be great.

We're on slide 7-- it's slavery, 1831.

There we go. There we go. Yeah, I'm frozen on my slide 6. So OK, we're on slide 7. That's perfect. Listen, when we talk about the institution of slavery, we have to be clear that following the 1831 insurrection by Nat Turner in Southampton, Virginia, which instilled the fear of God into enslavers and white folk throughout the South, many states, in what would become the Confederacy, in slaveholding states, passed laws that make it illegal to teach African Americans, whether enslaved or free, to read or to write. To educate African Americans becomes illegal against the law.

And so when we're talking about education, we have to understand that we are beginning, particularly as it relates to African Americans and people of color, we are beginning at a deficit. We're not beginning at a point of equality. Segregated education is really an extension of this desire to keep African Americans from learning anything in the very beginning. That's the starting point. The starting point is, it is illegal to teach African Americans to learn to read and write.

Despite that, despite that, an incredible number of African Americans, while still in bondage-- you think immediately of someone like Frederick Douglass-- learned to read and write through various means and through various ways. But still, at the moment of emancipation, the vast majority of the four million or so African Americans who were held in bondage, are unable to read and write, prevented from learning to read and write, and therefore, are unable to read and to write. Slide 8, please.

But at the moment of emancipation-- and this is important because it speaks to the question of educational inequity going forward-- it's important for us to acknowledge that African Americans had a deep desire, and have always had a deep desire, to secure an education. One of the great myths and misconceptions that we are still saddled with today that dates back to slavery is that African Americans did not desire to learn to read and write, that African Americans were uninterested in education. And nothing could be further from the truth.

And we still hear versions of that myth and misconception today, right? Oh, Black youth, they're uninterested in learning. It's not cool to be smart. Like, this is a rationalization to justify the poorly resourced schools today that stems back from the era of slavery in which one of those justifications was, not only are Black folk uninterested, they can't learn to read and write. And it's dangerous to teach them to learn to read and write.

The moment of emancipation puts a lie to those myths. Because at the moment of emancipation, we see African Americans acting on the deep desire that they always had, even while in bondage, to learn to read and write. African Americans understood, one foot in slavery, one foot in emancipation. So this is us taking seriously those African Americans who were held in bondage as political thinkers.

And we think that you're surviving, or that robbed of their humanity, slavery is held to be sure. But we have to take them seriously as political thinkers. And as political thinkers, African Americans understood the importance and centrality of education to freedom. Nobody had a better understanding of what it meant to be free than those who were living in bondage, and yet, living in the presence of people who were able to enjoy basic civil rights and human rights.

They knew the power of education. And once they get the space and opportunity to pursue it, which comes at the moment of emancipation, we see them doing it, right? They're sending the letters and petitions by the thousands to the Freedmen's Bureau, imploring the federal government to send teachers and resources to build schools. They're writing missionary societies of any denomination that would listen saying, please send us teachers. Please send us resources, because we value, we understand the importance of education.

It's during this Reconstruction moment, the post-emancipation period, we see the desire of African Americans to secure education. And it's during this Reconstruction moment in which we see African Americans moving formerly enslaved people, and formerly people who were free but living in the era of slavery, moving into state legislatures and then doing what? What's one of the very first things that they try to get past and are able to create? A public education infrastructure throughout the South.

Public education didn't exist in the South, certainly not for African Americans. It's illegal. But certainly, not even for white folk, right? Because the landed elite were uninterested in creating a public education system for poor white folk, working class white folk. The only reason why there's a public education system in the South and it's born in this Reconstruction period is because of the deep desire of African Americans to provide education for themselves, and by default, everyone in the South. Next slide, please, number 9.

But we have to be clear about something. And that is, what is the context that African Americans are emerging into in this post-emancipation Reconstruction moment? Because while African Americans are deeply desiring to secure an education, they're coming up against some serious forces that are still interested in keeping from them education. Why?

Because although-- and this goes back to the point of, in order to understand the present, we can't stop talking about slavery too soon-- at the moment of emancipation, although the institution of slavery ends, the motivation and the reason for the institution does not disappear in the hearts and minds of former enslavers and white folk in the South. This is critical.

Part of the legacy-- this is why we can't stop talking about-- we stopped talking about slavery too soon-- part of the legacy of the institution of slavery is the desire to continue to control Black labor, right? Slavery is an economic system. White supremacy is used to justify it, but slavery is an economic system, first and foremost, an economic system that revolves around controlling Black labor.

And so after emancipation, while the institution of slavery is no longer possible, the desire to control Black labor in ways as close to slavery as possible still persists. And therefore, we see African Americans winding up being bound to the land once again in a different way, not in a physical way as we see through the institution of slavery through shackles, but through debt, through sharecropping. And debt becomes the bond that holds African Americans to the land.

This is important because the desire to control what works against controlling Black labor is education. It's the thing that those whites who want to control Black labor and regulate Black behavior feared the most, in the same way that those-- because these are the same people who were holding Black folk in bondage. And so again, educational inequity will persist because there is no incentive on the part of the controlling whites once they regain-- white supremacists once they regain control of the South, which is a short period after emancipation-- there's no incentive for them to provide even a modicum of education for African Americans.

And so they begin to fight a war against it. Now, how do they do this? They're trying to protect this new economic system. So next slide, please, number 10.

This is where we have to think about the politics of freedom for Black folk. But the politics that are occurring in this moment, the late 19th century, is really about the politics of white supremacy. In 1890, starting in 1890, from 1890 to 1910, every state in the former Confederacy rewrite their state constitutions for the sole purpose of disenfranchising African Americans. So how are you going to protect this economic system that was put in place to replicate as close as possible, the control over Black labor that was lost during the institution of slavery?

The primary mechanism, legal mechanism that will be put in force to do that is disenfranchisement, taking the vote away from African Americans. And that's the sole purpose of every single one of these new state constitutions. This is something that the white legislators in Virginia and Alabama and Mississippi and North Carolina and South Carolina and Florida are clear about when they come together during their constitutional conventions. They are saying literally, the purpose of our constitutional conventions is to disenfranchise the Negro, to take the vote away from African Americans.

These laws are there to protect this economic system. So we have an economic system in this post-emancipation period that has no interest, no incentive in providing an equitable education for African Americans. So therefore, we see these segregated schools-- the public school system is already in place, but the school systems are dual education within the public education system. We see the unequal, grossly unequal funding for Black schools and white schools. Black schools by the turn of the 20th century are over overpopulated and under-resourced.

We see the pupil expenditures being unequal by amazing amounts, if you will, sometimes as much as 100 and 200 to 1 in terms of what was being spent on white student education and Black student education. And so these laws are designed to keep Black folk from going into elected office, from controlling the mechanisms of power, or having influence over the mechanisms of power, and lawmaking mechanisms so that they won't be able to change the laws as they relate to education as well to make an actual equitable education system.

So the politics play an important role. We'll see that in the contemporary moment as well. Politics play an important role in shaping educational opportunity and educational access. Slide 11, please, next slide.

All of that, the economic arrangement that's really driving the New South in particular in this moment-- we'll talk about the North in a second-- that's being protected by this suite of discriminatory Jim Crow laws and of course, 1896, *Plessy versus Ferguson*, Supreme Court ruled that segregation laws are constitutional. And we just see a new wave of segregation laws being passed to discriminate against African Americans.

But then it's the culture of white supremacy that we see being embedded into the South through groups like the Daughters of the Confederacy, that we begin to see in 1894, late 1890s, first two decades of the 20th century, them leading the charge in embedding white supremacist culture within the Southern landscape, which will then filter out to the broader American landscape. And they do this most visibly through the littering of the landscape with these monuments to Confederate soldiers and officers and the like. These are more clearly-- should be more clearly described as monuments to white supremacy. That's what they were. And we see those placed in front of county courthouses and all these other places.

But what we don't pay close enough attention to is that at the same time as they were doing that, establishing a physical presence for white supremacy, a visible presence for white supremacy in the public square, the Daughters of the Confederacy were also creating committees to review books, textbooks, that would be used in classrooms and that would be banned in classrooms. They were creating censorship boards for schools, public schools, throughout the south.

And if you weren't towing, if your book, if your material was not towing a white supremacist line, then it would not be included. Now you say, OK, well, this is terrible that it would impact those Black folk and white children and Black children in the South. And maybe that was a year or two. This wasn't a year or two. This goes on for half a century.

It's not until we see the-- not until we have a couple Supreme Court cases in the 1970s that these book-banning, these censorship boards, that are quasi public because they're coming out of a private organization, but the state government, state legislatures are bending the knee to them that finally they're like, wait a minute. Like, this is kind of unconstitutional.

So this is 50 years, half a century. And not until the Civil Rights and Black Power movement do we finally get past those. And at the same time, these same boards that are promoting educational indoctrination-- we hear a lot about that today, educational indoctrination. No, we know what educational indoctrination actually is and actually looks like, because there's an actual history of it in the United States that's centered around the promotion of this thing called The Lost Cause, which is the cultural justification of the exploitation of Black labor. I mean, that's all that is.

We're going to justify and rationalize slavery in the Civil War and defeating Reconstruction in order to promote white supremacy at the turn of the 20th century and early 20th century. That's educational indoctrination. We know what it looks like because we have a history of it.

And because of the power and influence, the commercial power and influence of an organization like the Daughters of the Confederacy and these censorship boards that come into play, then large national textbook companies by mid-century will be yielding to the desires of these segregationist book boards, text book boards. And so we find that books, textbooks that are used, not just in Alabama and in Georgia, but now in New York and California are similar, are still promoting this white supremacist lie because they're not producing extra ones just for New York.

And so the influence, this cultural influence is so critically important that we understand that the promotion of white supremacy and all of that-- because it's not just an ideology. It's the rationalization for inequality-- is something that is deeply rooted in the early 20th century, coming out of the South and tied to the promotion of this idea of the Lost Cause. The next slide, please. That would be number 12.

It is important always, just as we saw African Americans who are newly emancipated clamoring for access to education, it is critically important that we recognize that even during the depths of Jim Crow, when lynching was at its highest, when two to three African Americans are being publicly murdered every week someplace in America, and mostly in the South, when preachers and teachers are being targeted for not teaching, or not toting a white supremacy lie, either in the pulpit or in the classroom, that African Americans were still finding a way to teach history accurately to children. This is primarily occurring within the African American community and is led in an organized fashion by folk like Carter G. Woodson, who many of us will know and recognize as the father of Black History, Negro History Week, which eventually will become Black History Month.

But Carter G. Woodson, through the formation-- as the co-founder in 1915 of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, NLH, which is now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History-- Carter G. Woodson is creating, through ASNLH, is creating textbooks and primary source materials and readers and primers on history, on African American history, on African civilization, on African history, and sending them out to Black educational teaching associations in the Jim Crow South, in Jim Crow America, where is literally illegal and forbidden to teach history accurately-- sound familiar, Florida-- to teach history accurately. They're still finding ways to do it secretly, covertly, but they're getting the word out. They're putting the truth before our students.

So one of the things that we have to keep in mind is, while certainly we're still dealing with the various aspects of educational inequality that we've always had to deal with that-- we've always had to deal with obstacles and barriers put in front of teachers who are committed to teaching history accurately and effectively. But as long as we've seen these barriers, we have also seen that there have been educators, teachers, formal and informal, who have done what has been necessary to continue to teach the truth to our young people. Next slide, please, number 13.

We can't forget that the role of violence in all of this-- violence was the cornerstone of slavery. Violence was also the cornerstone of freedom. And the enforcement mechanism that kept Jim Crow, segregated education, viable was racial terrorism. It was racial terrorism. Sometimes, it manifested itself, as we see in this image in Wilmington, North Carolina in 18-- at the turn of the 20th century, in which a coalition of Black and white Republicans in office, elected officials, largest city in North Carolina at the time, are run out of office, run out of town, Black community devastated, Black press destroyed-- this was part of the reign of racial terror that would persist for 2/3 of the 20th century that would take various forms, whether we're talking about racial massacres, as we saw, for example, in Wilmington, North Carolina, these racial pogroms that we would see, not just in the South, but in the Midwest and in the Northeast, East St Louis in 1917, Red Summer of 1919, Rosewood, Florida, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1921.

Like, racial terror is at the corner, is the cornerstone and the foundation of racial inequality, including educational inequality. So we can't just say, oh, it's unfortunate that educational inequality has persisted so long. Really wish Black folk would have done something more. Black folk are trying to survive.

And if you attempt in that moment in time, we're talking about through the first half of the 20th century, to do something about it, you run the risk of losing your life. Down in Florida in the 1950s, civil rights activists, the Moores, our teachers, Harry and Harriette Moore, our teachers down in Florida who are murdered, their home is bombed-- they're killed in Christmas in the early 1950s. These are teachers-- because they dared cross that line from the classroom to public advocacy for making sure that children, Black children get the education that they deserve. So we can't forget that the backdrop for all of the educational equality that we're talking about, particularly during the first half of the 20th century, is racial terror and racial violence. Slide 14, please.

One of the powerful things-- again, thinking about this balance between here's the context, and then how do people respond. One of the powerful things that we see in the effort to secure educational or create educational equity is the willingness of students and young people, Black students in particular, Black young people in particular, to challenge the status quo, even when it was dangerous to do so.

So in 1951, we see, in Virginia, young people led by Barbara Johns at the Moton School, organizing a Wildcat strike, if you will. Not even letting their teachers and administrators know that they were going to go out on strikes in their Black school because they understood the ways in which they were being deprived and robbed of an equitable education.

And so they're like no, no, no. We've had enough. Right? And we're going to organize. We're not just going to grumble under our breath on the playground or in the cafeteria. We are going to organize and demand more from those who are in positions of power when it was dangerous to do so.

This is important because one of the things I want us to think about is-- when we think about creating change is what is the role of students going to be, right, in forcing this issue? Because it's not just going to be us as educators and committed parents and the like. It's going to be the students and the young people, the young people themselves, right, who are really-- who have to be at the forefront of this charge because they've always been at the forefront of this charge.

The willingness of folks, like Barbara Johns, eventually, will lead to a series-- to challenge educational inequality will lead to the series of cases. And next slide 15, please. Will lead to a series of cases that combined would be come to be known as *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*. Right? This is 1954, 1955, Supreme Court ruling that segregation in education is unconstitutional. That's critical. Yeah, that's critical.

We often celebrate-- and it's funny, because I ask my students. I teach at Ohio State civil rights movement history, US history. And when I ask my students, when we get to *Brown*, and we're talking about *Brown*, I ask my students, after the *Brown* decision is passed or is handed down, what happened to segregated schools? Right? Did they immediately desegregate? Right?

And this is an image of Thurgood Marshall, who was one of the team that led the charge to get the Supreme Court to rule that settled to see, acknowledge that segregation in education is unconstitutional. And one of the things that the students say is like, well, yeah, we guess it happened immediately. Right?

Obviously, it was anything further from the truth. And we'll circle back to that in a second. There are a couple important things that we have to consider when we think about *Brown*. Right? Like the *Brown* decision of 1954 does not solve educational inequity.

We see, of course, that the Supreme Court rules, overturns *Plessy*, separate but equal can never be. Segregation in education is unconstitutional. But that's what the court rules in *Brown I*. The very next year in *Brown II*, of course, the Supreme Court, when given an opportunity to create a timetable for implementation, demurs. They famously write that desegregation, the dismantling of the dual education public education system has to proceed, quote, "with all deliberate speed," which means at the pace of white Southerners own choosing, which means it wasn't ever going to happen.

And so we see-- next slide, please, number 16-- so we see, as a result of the Supreme Court refusing to provide, really redress to those who were victims of segregation in education, by passing the buck and saying, y'all just go ahead and start working on it. We see this wave of massive white resistance. This, of course, is one of the famous photographs taken in Arkansas in 1957 when the Little Rock Nine, nine Black students who were selected by members of the NAACP and the Black community to desegregate, be among the first wave of Black students to desegregate Little Rock Central High school.

And we see the mob that formed. And these aren't the people who turned out to prevent, the thousands who turned out to prevent these Black youngsters from going to Central High School, right? They weren't hooded Klansmen. They were housewives. Right? They were mothers for liberty, if you will, at the time. They were the owners of the Dallas Cowboys. Right?

I mean, these were the members of white society who were engaged in this massive effort of resistance to continue educational inequality. Right? Like, this is not-- in other words, the educational inequality that we're walking through across time was not an accident. Right? This is the function of the racist decisions of members of the community.

This is also why-- this image right here is also why we see so many people who are against teaching and talking about this history. Right? Because it actually identifies and names people in society who are responsible for it. When I talk about this with my students, I remember one time one of my students said-- a young white girl from Ohio, she said, well, Dr. Jeffries, you know, my grandmother, you know, she lived in I think it was Georgia at the time. Right? She said she grew up in Georgia. She was in Georgia. Does this mean that my grandma was a racist?

And I was like, my dear, it is more than likely that mema was a racist. And she-- I mean, we got to accept that. Right? I mean, it was in the air that they breathe. And they were hostile to segregation. That's the reality of it.

It doesn't make you a bad person today. But you got to understand the roots of this. James Baldwin said, we are our history. He didn't say we are our good history. We are bad-- we are all of it. And we have to accept it. We have to accept that educational inequality has persisted because people have fought to preserve it.

Again, even in the wake of that-- next slide, please, number 17-- even in the wake of that, we see creative ways that activists and organizers and Black parents, particularly, and Black activists, in particular, have gone about trying to provide children with the education that they deserve. Right? Black children in this particular instance. So during the Civil Rights movement in 1964 in Mississippi, we saw the creation of Freedom Schools, alternative parallel institutions, schools that-- schools in quotes because they weren't meeting in school rooms that were controlled by segregated county school boards. But they're meeting in Black businesses and parlors and under trees and in the backs of homes and churches. Right? And providing them with a modicum of honest education. Right? Talking, not just about math and literacy and reading and French, but talking about the Constitution and the rights that Black children have and Black people have in Mississippi. Right?

I mean this is powerful. It's a powerful model. If we can't-- a powerful model that said if you're going to keep us from teaching the truth in the classroom, then we're going to take the truth and the classroom, or we're going to take the truth outside of the classroom and create these alternative structures for sharing knowledge and information. It is something that we have to consider.

Now, of course, there are organizations, like the Children's Defense Fund, that comes out of the Civil Rights movement that has adopted this model on a wide scale basis. But it is also something that we should be considering doing as the wave of divisive issues, laws, and books banning, and the banning of African American studies, and all these other things begin to take root elsewhere. Next slide, please.

Brown, as I said, and I asked my students, when do you think desegregation actually occurred? And most of them, most of the kids will say, oh, it occurred right after the *Brown* decision is passed. And of course, it doesn't. It's not until 1965 that we begin to see the actual desegregation of public schools in the South, emphasis on in the South.

This is an image of the 1965 Voting Rights, the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. And of course, when we think about the major civil rights legislation of the 1960s, we often talk about the '64 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Occasionally, we'll talk about the New Immigration bill, which was critical, which opens up avenues for immigrants from across the country, immigrants across the world to come to the United States on a more equitable basis. Nikki Haley should look into that.

But in 1965, there's another bill that we don't hear that much about, but which is critical. That's the Elementary and Secondary Education. That's the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And that's absolutely critical because what that does-- you have the 1964 Civil Rights Act that says we're not going to fund-- or if you segregate or discriminate on the basis of race, we're going to withhold federal dollars. You won't be eligible for federal dollars.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act then sets aside hundreds of millions of dollars to go into public education in those school districts that were grossly underfunded across the nation but particularly in the South. And it's at that moment when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is passed that we see school boards beginning token desegregation. Right? They're not serious. They have freedom of choice. They put the burden on moving into white schools on the shoulders of Black parents. But this is when it happens, 10 years after Brown because there's a degree of interest convergence on the part-- not on the part of white parents, on the part of white school boards in the South to gain access to these resources.

Two things happen. One, when the school boards open up white schools to Black folk in the South, most Black people in the South are like, yeah, hard pass on that. Because the goal had never been-- for most Black people, the goal had never been to sit your Black child next to some white child in front of a white teacher who hated your Black child because she hated Black people. This is 1965. Let's be clear about what that was. That was the last thing that Black people wanted.

Like, they're organizing-- when they're organizing, they're organizing for gaining access to resources to improve Black schools. Right? Because those are the spaces that had the history and tradition. Those are the spaces that had the teachers who loved them and cared for them. They weren't perfect. They were grossly under-resourced. Teachers were grossly underpaid. But it is what has sustained Black people through the generations.

There's only a small group of folk who are willing to send their Black children almost as sacrifice into white schools in this moment when the students and the teachers and the administrators were still hostile toward them. You're talking about a sacrifice, not only on the part of the parents but also on the part of the students to be one of five, the Ruby Bridges, the Little Rock Nine. I mean, it just-- it blows your mind.

But they were doing that, not because, again, they believed like somehow white children are magical. You know? I teach a lot of white children at the Ohio State University. Ain't nothing magical about white children other than the ability to attract tax dollars wherever they go. Right?

So desegregation, integrating these white schools was a way of bringing about, hopefully, educational equity, not because Black children needed to sit next to white children because white children-- they would somehow get a better education through osmosis. But because they understood that in America, the way this world was working that was the only way to gain access to tax resources. Black people have been paying taxes, double taxes, triple taxes, but weren't benefiting those resources because they were always following white children. And that's what we see.

But even having-- next slide, please, number 19-- but even having just a handful-- I'm talking about token desegregation in '65 and '66 and '67, what do we see? We see white parents. This is the first time we really see that crack in sort of white solidarity in the South, in particular. We see white parents upset with white school board officials because they're like even letting in one and two and three-- Little Rock, Arkansas nine-- that was too much. It was too much. It was a bridge too far.

And so we see for the first time in a substantive, organized way white parents pulling their children out of public schools, particularly in those areas that had large Black populations. And so that Black Belt, the majority Black, those majority Black counties that stretch from the Tidewater Virginia to Texas, some of these counties, 50%, 60%, 70% 80% African American. In those places, we see, starting in the mid-1960s after token desegregation begins, white parents pulling their children out of public schools. And then creating private white segregationist academies. Keep that in mind. Remember this. Put a flag in it. Creating private white segregationist academies.

And explicit about what this is. We are creating this private white school because we don't want Black children sitting next to our white children. Right? And so they create these segregationist private white academies.

And then, they realize something. They realize that this damn thing is expensive. Right? It was a lot easier to provide an education for our white children when we were paying taxes and taking taxes from Black folk to fund their education than it is to pay a private school tuition.

So from the very beginning, in states like Alabama and Mississippi, we see that segregationist politicians are trying to divert public money into private white academies. And for the first decade or so, first two decades, we see that the federal government and the courts are like, no, that's unconstitutional. Right? You're violating '64 Civil Rights Act. This is fundamentally unconstitutional. But that doesn't keep them from trying. And we'll see how that evolves-- the desire to pull public dollars into private schools evolves out of this effort to fund, through public money, these private white segregationist academies.

Next slide, please, number 20. Now, of course, we've been talking for the most time-- I've been talking for the most part about the South, the Jim Crow South. But we must not forget that segregated education existed across the nation. And just by custom, but very much by policy. Right? If you set housing policy and make housing policy rooted in racial segregation, then, of course, a neighborhood school structure will reflect segregated housing patterns. And it was intentional and not accidental. Right?

The public schools in Levittown in Long Island, in Levittown outside of Philadelphia, will be all white because the Levittowns are all white on purpose. And in the deeds and the homes that are sold when these suburban communities are brought on line, they say these homes cannot be sold to Black people. Right? And so you don't have to say anything about the school because the policy of housing will create the segregation that's desired in the schools.

And in 1964, the question of segregation based upon the supplemental policies de facto-- we say de facto but it's still rooted in law-- is not taken up by the Supreme Court. Right? So that question, those schools outside of the South that are not governed by explicit segregation policies, they will remain segregated. So much so that in 1964, the largest anti-segregation in education demonstration, 1964, February 1964, will take place in New York City, where 400,000 mostly Black but also Puerto Rican students will walk out of their schools because they're protesting segregation and resource inequality in their schools.

And of course, the slide that you have in front of you is depicting the response. This is a famous photograph that's depicting the response to busing in Boston. Right? And again, the response-- we often talk about-- there's a number of wonderful books that have come out recently that talk about really deconstruct what we were talking about we're talking about busing. Right?

Like, parents, white parents in Boston and elsewhere, they weren't rejecting the idea of transporting children to school on buses. White kids have been riding buses forever. That ain't been the problem. The problem is who's being transported on these buses. Right?

So this was a response, again, to desegregation. Right? Desegregating white schools. Even on white terms, it was too much. And so that response leads to a number of-- by the time we move into the late 1970s, early 1980s, leads to a number of creative ways to maintain segregation.

Segregation. Next slide, please, number 21. And I'll wrap up in just a couple minutes. Number 21. This is the high school that I went to. I started in 1986 as a freshman, Midwood High School.

And when I attended Midwood High School, this is a school that had a couple thousand students, larger than my college at Morehouse College, a couple thousand students. And they had three programs. They had a science program, magnet program, drawing students from all across the country. They had a humanities program drawing students from across the city, excuse me. And then they had sort of the collegiate track, which drew students from the surrounding neighborhood.

The collegiate track was 80% African American, Caribbean because the Flatbush neighborhood from which it drew was majority African American and Caribbean. The two magnet programs, the exceptional accelerated programs, like winning national awards for excellence that I was a part of, right? Had to take an interview to get into, my brother and I, medical science. These were overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly white.

So my classes in this magnet program, I'm one of only two maybe three Black students in a class that is in a school that is 60-70% Black. Right? So resegregation as a desire to maintain educational inequity within the same building. So we have to be clear about not only how this plays out, how educational inequity continues to evolve, because the desire of people to maintain and hoard resources for some populations and not for all.

Next slide, please. Because one of the things-- again, those segregationist academies that we talked about coming in mid-1960s, they will evolve. They will be rebranded in the 1970s as Christian academies. You wonder where these Christian academies come from across the landscape of the United States. They come from segregationist academies. That's what they are. They were simply rebranded in the 1970s.

But the desire to find funding for those will persist. And soon by the time we get to the 1980s and the early 1990s, we begin to see the Republican Party, the inheritors of the segregationist Democrats, pushing for programs like block grants and creating charter schools and all this stuff, which was part of that extension of the deep desire to find ways to get public money to pay for these private white schools.

A dual education system was emerging. It was no longer within the public schools system, but it was public and private. Right? That's one of the ways in which education inequity would be maintained in the post-Brown era.

Next slide, please, number 23. Another one of the ways in which educational inequity has been maintained has been through these terrible decisions that the Supreme Court under the Roberts court has passed in recent years, including in a case coming out of Seattle and in Louisville, which said that school districts that are voluntarily trying to pursue equitable racial populations within their schools can't use race in order to achieve that with regard to pupil assignment. So the Supreme Court has been hostile to efforts to create racial balance and, therefore, create a greater degree of racial equity within school systems, even when those school systems are voluntarily. And the parents and the community are saying, this is what we want to do. And of course, we're waiting for the Supreme Court. I haven't checked CNN today to see if they've ruled or handed down their ruling, which is pretty much going to put the nail in the coffin on affirmative action policies with regard to admissions in colleges and elsewhere.

Next slide, please. These are the last two slides. And then I'll wrap up. Hopefully, y'all still there. I don't even know if you all still there. [INAUDIBLE] next. I may be just talking to myself in this room.

In 2020, we saw the largest protest in US history, right? When 20 to 30 million people-- 20 to 30 million people take to the streets protesting the killing, police killings and vigilante killings, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others. One of the things, though, that we saw in those protests was our children, Black children and white children, Asian, and Latino demanding the removal of these monuments to white supremacy.

And that's important because what those kids were telling us was that in addition to ending police violence and racial terrorism and the like, they wanted to be taught the truth about America's past and present. They were telling us that. They were like end systemic racism and teach us the truth. And remove these monuments and teach us truth. They were demanding that.

And so in response to that-- in response to that, we wind up-- next slide, please, number 25-- we wind up with states across the South, Republican controlled GOP states-- again, this isn't being partisan. This is just laying out the facts of what happened. Passing these anti-- divisive issues, anti-honesty in education, anti-critical race theory laws designed to limit what can be taught in the classroom. Designed to limit what can be taught in the classroom.

And now, also, passing laws designed to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion programming diversity, equity, inclusion funding. And that's the way that you keep alive-- you keep open the doors of opportunity. Right? Florida's, you know, rejecting AP African American studies. The governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, saying African American history, African American studies has no educational value. Has no educational value. Are you serious?

Because they don't want these kids to learn this history, because once they learn this history, and they accept it as true, then they want to do something about it. They want to remove those monuments to white supremacy. They want to put a stake through the heart of the devil that is white supremacy. And they don't want to deal with that.

I was going to end here with Ron DeSantis, but I can't end with him up there. Right? So next slide, please, my last slide. And many of you may have seen this. This is a photograph of students who were at medical-- Black medical students down in Louisiana who took a field trip-- on their own accord took a field trip out to the Whitney plantation, which is a former slave plantation. The students were from Dillard-- medical students from Dillard, I believe. Took a student-- took a field trip out to the Whitney plantation.

And they described this picture as our moment of resiliency. In other words, these were young people, Black young folk who were coming up through the educational system and made their way through college, K through 12, college, and medical school. And they were standing on an enslaved persons cabin and just imagining thinking about what that life of that enslaved person would have been.

And yet, saying that they are their legacy. They are the ones who have endured through all that-- through all that terror, through all that trauma, through all that the denial of access to education. They are the realization of their ancestors, our ancestors' wildest dreams.

So the obstacles are real. The obstacles are there. But the young people are saying that they will persist. The resiliency has always been there. This is a moment where things are not getting easier. The sun is not shining brighter. The storm clouds are certainly roiling. But the people are ready to fight. And the young people are ready to fight too.

And I think that's an important point for us to keep in mind as we move forward as teachers and educators, that the kids not only deserve it, but the kids desire it. And I think that puts us in a better position than even those who are opposed to creating the change that we need. So with that, Brother Becton, I turn it back over to you.

Wow. Dr. Jeffries, if you can allow me a bit of colloquial right now. That was a bad presentation. You are one bad dude. And for those of you all who don't get it, bad means good right here. No.

And more seriously, that was perhaps the most brilliant walk through 400 years of history and connecting it to education inequity today than I've ever heard. And I've been doing this work a while. And I just appreciate the brilliance, the scholarship, the personal insight. And I also appreciate that the very practical application and accessibility of your scholarship. And that is we have 200 or so educators listening. And it's accessible, and it's important. And I just thank you for the gift of your scholarship but also the way in which you present it. So thank you so much. It's just amazing--

Thank you.

--presentation. A question I was grappling with a little bit as you were sharing. And you asked if we're still with you. Absolutely. And we were highly engaged.

The question that I was grappling with was just the bigger question of history and the importance of grounding today's education issues in a historical context. And I'm not even talking about white extremists and those who are viscerally and unashamedly trying to perpetuate white supremacy in schools. I'm even talking about well-meaning people. Sometimes I run into even well-meaning educators who don't value putting these things in historical context.

So can you speak to what is lost when we glaze over the history? And what is gained? What's the value add to slowing down, to say let's understand this where we are in historical context? Can you speak to that a little bit, the importance of the context?

Yeah, no, certainly. And like you said, it's not just those who are intentionally trying to bury this history who shy away from it, who shy away from what I call hard history. On the one year anniversary of January 6th, President Joe Biden gave a very powerful speech. And you can go back and look at it on C-span in which he talks about white supremacy and racial terrorism and the threat to American democracy.

And he talks specifically about the use of racial violence to attempt to stop the peaceful transfer of power on January 6th that shocked the nation. Right? But then he went on to say, Brother Becton, he said, you know, this is not who we are.

Yeah.

And then and then he adds, and this is never who we have been.

I remember the speech. I remember that. Yeah.

Yeah. You might have been like me. I was like Joe! Joe! My man, I was with you, but what are you talking about? That's what I'm saying. We are afraid to confront the harsh realities of America's past. America was born of racial violence and political violence. What are you talking about? It's American Revolution, the Civil War, the maintaining of Jim Crow. We cannot run from that.

If we don't accept in this instance, for example, difficult and hard truths that this nation was born of racial violence and racial terrorism, political violence and political terrorism, was almost torn apart by it, then when it rears its ugly-- that was a Civil War-- then when it rears its head again motivated by white supremacy and a call or using racism to animate people to attempt to stop the peace transfer of power, then we're not prepared to deal with it. We're not prepared to address it.

Yes.

We would have been better off had we had an honest conversation over the years about democracy and the threats to it, we never would have saw January 6th. Or we certainly would have a better position to deal with it as it was emerging and when it came afterward. And we would have took seriously that white supremacists are the principal threat to a multiracial democracy.

That's the value of it. It's not just learning for the sake of learning. We have to learn these hard truths, not so that we don't repeat it. You often hear, right? If you don't study history, you're doomed to repeat it. No, I'm not worried about repeating anything because we haven't stopped doing this stuff. Right?

I'm trying to stop it. Right? We need to learn this stuff so we stop doing the things that have perpetuated inequality into the present. Right? Saying that we're going to repeat it is giving us too much credit for something that we haven't done. We have to stop it. We have to disrupt it. And the only way that we can do that is if we take this hard and honest look at the past. And if we don't, then the status quo will prevail. And there are those who want to maintain the status quo because they continue to benefit from it.

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. A question from the audience of our listeners. Thank you all for being with us. I think it's a great question around going back into history looking at the impact of *Brown*, post-*Brown* on Black communities. You know, where Black institutions in some ways were a safety net for Black people. And then maybe the question is suggesting that post-*Brown*, desegregation may have lost some of that. Was there a loss there to you? How would you think about that impact on Black communities?

Yeah. No, to be sure. I mean, when we talk about desegregation, we don't talk about the actual real and practical harm and change and institutional loss that came about as a result of the way that desegregation proceeded. Because desegregation did not proceed on an equitable basis. Desegregation was about moving Black resources and Black children into white spaces.

And that meant we lost Black educators, Black teachers, Black administrators, Black school building facility people. Right? I mean, that does not-- we don't get that full integration. And then, as a result, we also lose schools, particularly Black high schools, right, and all of that history.

Now, that being said, we have to recognize that, and that's why many Black folk were like, no, we don't need this. We're just calling for access to resources. But that is not to say that we should never have attempted desegregation. We had to get off of the books these laws that discriminated against because separate would never be equal. That we have to be clear about. Ain't no going back to the glory days of Jim Crow. No.

We can see the ways in which Black folk survived and had to build institutions within it, yes. But we also have to realize that there was no moving forward into the late 20th century or early 21st century without removing those laws. The problem wasn't that desegregation occurred. The problem was the way in which desegregation occurred. And we still haven't rectified that process so that these Black institutions, Black schools, Black serving schools could thrive within this new environment.

Yeah.

Ain't nothing wrong with going to an all-Black school or being schooled with all Black and brown children. Ain't nothing wrong with that. Right? I mean, I went to Morehouse College, historically Black college. I learned a whole lot from my brothers and sisters. The problem is about the resource access. Right? That has always been what the issue is.

Yeah. Yeah. So Dr. Jeffries, our seminar participants come from all kinds of communities-- non-Black folk. Thinking about this history, and what did it mean to students and educators that were non-Black at the height of what you've been describing here.

What we know, and I'm sure you as a scholar, is that whiteness is a construct that was defined by whiteness itself. And whiteness historically determined who was white and who was included as white and who wasn't white. So whiteness defines itself. That's what white supremacy does.

So as whiteness was defining itself historically in the context of education, what was happening with people who were like maybe Southeast Asian who could maybe pass as white but were not truly white in this context? What was happening to other folk? Can you speak to that a little bit?

Yeah, well, certainly. And it's an important question because one of the things as, Brother Becton as you pointed out, race isn't real. Right? I mean, it's created. Something that we know was created. It was created to rationalize and justify hierarchy, right, as the transatlantic slave trade began to-- international slavery began to grow and expand and rooted on the kidnapping, buying, and selling of Black bodies. So we know that race itself is a myth. It's a social construct. It's biologically meaningless.

But it's socially meaningful. Right? Because it has provided this rationalization and justification for creating hierarchy, privileging some, disadvantaging others. That being said, those two things-- race isn't real, it's biologically meaningless, but it's socially meaningful-- explains why in Brazil, for example, there are 18 or 19 different official racial categories. Right?

But not surprisingly at the top of that racial hierarchy when you measure it in terms of wealth and opportunity, it's people who are more phenotypically European, and at the bottom, people who are more phenotypically African. But that's because you had more Indigenous African, European mixture of people there. You get these 18 different racial hierarchies.

In the US, we have a binary. We've always viewed race through this Black-white prism. Right? And so it doesn't mean that other folk weren't here, of course. It means that their place in society always has been viewed through this Black-white prism.

And so are you closer to the Black spectrum? Closer to the African spectrum? Or are you closer to European, to the White spectrum? Can you move into that white prism? I mean, this was when the Irish and [INAUDIBLE] over here and catching a little hell, and the Italians come over as immigrants in the early 20th century, late 19th century, early 20th century, and they're catching a little hell. Why are they catching hell? They're catching hell because they're being described as swarthy. Right? They're being described as too Black. You can't tap into the whiteness in a Black-white binary.

But give them a generation, they anglicized the name. And then what are they then able to access? That white privilege. They are able to move into that.

So sometimes we see other groups, Latino groups, Asian groups, who come over. And it's like, all right, well, where do we fit in? Well, that's up to society to figure out based upon this Black-white primary. What neighborhoods can you live in? Where can you go to school? How are you being treated?

Obviously, it's not perfect. But it's because the society had been framed, American society had been framed based upon this Black-white prism, then in order to understand how other groups have had to fit in, you have to understand how the color line was created with this idea of white folk controlling Black folk labor.

Yeah. That's powerful. Dr. Jeffries, I'm going to be transparent with everybody. I look forward to a time when we no longer have to answer this question. Ask and answer this question, but I'm going to bring it up because it's coming up in the chat a bit. And that is the question of white fragility, and how do we-- trying to do this work and speak truth, how do we navi-- how are you navigating white fragility? How are you addressing folks who are wanting to try to reframe your work and this work as political, as propaganda?

You know the narratives that are out there. How are you dealing with those narratives when they're in the room? And again, I wish for a time where we don't have to center this fragility because there's too much important work to be done to worry about people's discomfort. But at any rate, it's part of the mix. How are you grappling with that?

Yeah. So you know, I think there's this hostility, which we often don't name, and then there's fragility. Right? So the hostility is those who are adamantly opposed, right, to talking about these issues. Adamantly opposed to addressing these issues. And they're openly hostile.

And sometimes those openly hostile people get lumped into the category of just being sort of fragile. I'm like, no, we could separate those two out. Right? Because the hostility is like those who have an investment in maintaining in a very explicit way the power and privilege connected to whiteness.

The fragility can sometimes be read as like, listen, I've grown up in this white world. I haven't been exposed to this. And now, you're raising these issues. And that causes me to have to question everything I thought about my world and my identity and my life and my family and my society. That's fine. Like, I don't have a problem with that. That's called evolving. Right? That's called reflection.

And I think as an educator in particular, it is my job in the classroom and even beyond that define the classroom broadly to help people on that journey, to engage in that work. Now, I can't do it. And none of us can do that work for other people. We can show them sort of a road map. And say, hey, good luck on the journey. Here's some resources. But there has to be a buy-in and investment.

If anybody-- as an educator like you, if you're willing to learn, I'm willing to learn with you. I'm willing to walk with you. But I separate that out from those who are working in actively against the best interests of other people. James Baldwin said that we can disagree, but this is moving beyond just simply the measure of fragility. And this idea of now I got to figure out where my place in this world is and my own identity and the like.

James Baldwin said that we can disagree and still love one another.

Yeah.

He said, we can disagree and still love one another. He said, but we can't do that if our disagreement is over my right to exist, is over my humanity. If we're disagreeing over my humanity, then we cannot love each other because you can't question my right to exist.

And so that's kind of where I draw the line. Where are you on this? Are you questioning my right to engage and explore my own history as a Black person? Then you're questioning my humanity and my right to exist. Are you questioning-- you don't want to talk about folk in the LGBTQ+ community, right, because you question their right to exist? Then, that's not a policy issue. That's not an educational issue. That's a question of humanity. And then we got issues. Right?

Yeah.

Because that's not going to be the resolve through debate. That's going to be resolved through power. Right? And we got to be clear about that. We can have conversations, but sometime that conversation needs to be about how are we going to get the power to change the laws and implement the policies because these folk over here are just crazy. Right? They're crazy, not insane, but they're crazy in terms of what they're willing to do to maintain their interests and their privileges.

Yeah. Awesome. Dr. Jeffries, and we are out of time. I can let everybody else go, and we can keep talking. But no, but this is so engaging. Thank you again from my colleagues at Facing History and Ourselves.

I love the distinction you made at the end because that's how we approach our work. We assume that there's a lot of people, especially educators, out there that may be fragile but have good intentions. And want what's best for students. And we want to invite them to this conversation not to blame and shame, but to do critical thinking and critical analysis. And just overcome a lot of these things that we talk about in your talk today.

So thank you so much, again, for being here. For you all who are here with us, I want to just make a couple of really quick announcements if you can stick around. And that last slide on our learning opportunities, we can get that slide up on our learning opportunity.

There's another amazing webinar coming up. Mark your calendar. With Dr. Nicole West Burns. You see the title there Increasing Achievement, Engaging, Belonging-- and something we don't talk enough about-- Joy. So you see the other webinars there. I wanted to lift that one.

We have a school leaders institute. Go to our website, facinghistory.org. You can find all of these listed there. I won't go through each one because we are out of time.

Again, thank you, Dr. Jeffries. I'm going to put a dot dot dot at the end of this conversation to say to be continued because we will invite you back again. Thanks so much.

Thank you. Good evening, everyone.

Thank you for joining us for this learning opportunity. The resources from the webinar can be accessed from the resource list window. You will receive an email with links to these resources after the webinar. Your completion of this webinar gives you one hour of professional development credit. And you can download your certificate of participation via the window below.

You will also see a very brief survey. Please take a couple of minutes at the end of the webinar to fill out this survey. We really value your feedback. We will keep the webinar open for the next five minutes so you can download your certificate, complete the survey, and open the resources.

Thank you for joining us, and we look forward to seeing you at another online professional learning opportunity soon. From all of us at Facing History and Ourselves to you, take care. Wherever you're joining us from, we wish you peace, health, safety, and community.

[MUSIC PLAYING]