

I taught middle school in Springfield, OR for almost 40 years. Believing that teaching about racism was critical to developing open-minded, responsible, law-abiding citizens, I developed my own curriculum about racism (supplemented with excellent materials from Southern Poverty Law Center) as part of my 7th grade social studies curriculum. Students responded positively to this instruction--many had never heard about the history of slavery in the U.S., Reconstruction, Jim Crow--or Oregon's sundown laws and other attempts to keep Oregon's cities white. I believe that teaching the history of racism in the U.S., the ability to recognize racist acts, ideas and policies, and to formulate corresponding anti-racist acts, ideas and policies, is key to eradicating racism. Without ARCA's mandatory standards, teaching this history and these skills will continue to be voluntary--and thus often avoided--allowing systemic racism to continue to flourish.

We all suffer from racial biases to varying extents. Racial indifference and "color blindness" enable systemic racism. We must acknowledge our own racist history, recognize racist activity that continues in the present, and understand each individual's responsibility in ending it. Germany mandates Holocaust curriculum, so it won't happen again. Rwanda mandates a four-part education and reconciliation program, so genocide won't happen again. We should be at least as responsible as these countries.

While HB 2845 mandated K-12 standards on the "histories, contributions and perspectives of ethnic . . . and social minorities" that "promote critical thinking regarding the interaction between systemic social structures and ethnic . . . or social minority status," the Ethnic Studies Act does not mention race or racism, nor teaching anti-racist skills, nor does it specifically require such curriculum. SB683, the Anti-racism Curriculum Act (ARCA) would help correct this critical instructional omission.