

I firmly oppose SB 683.

While America, and Oregon in particular, does in fact bear the sin of racism and slavery in its past, this bill presents an overwhelmingly one-sided and deceptive view of history. Along with the truly shameful misdeeds of the past, there have been beautifully historic strides in rectifying those injustices. America's story is not just one of evil but a great triumph over evil—it is a story of redemption. That part of the story must be told—this bill does not once mention the triumphs throughout history to overcome and improve on the past. Where in the bill is there any mention of the repeal of the Black Exclusion Laws in Oregon? This is just as much a part of our history as existence of the laws in the first place.

This bill perpetuates a victimhood mentality and the Marxist themes of oppressor vs oppressed. How does this lift and help our students to achieve excellence? Rather, this mentality works to enslave our youth of all colors with victimhood, guilt and hopelessness.

The greatest American educator to have ever lived was Booker T. Washington. He famously did not let the biases and prejudices of his day hold himself or any of his students back (and who can argue he did not face the worst? He himself was a slave as a child, persistently sought an education despite his poverty, and went on to establish a phenomenally successful school in the heart of the racist South throughout the difficult years of Reconstruction). He was staunchly opposed to efforts such as SB 683, denouncing those “who make a business of keeping the troubles, the wrongs, and the hardships of the Negro race before the public.”

America is like a man who had a terrible drinking problem and caused a lot of heartache and grief through his drunken behavior. Finally a day of reckoning came and this man went through the AA program. It was hard and took time but the man acknowledged his sins and has turned his life around. He continually strives to be better now and abstains from alcohol. Do we now, knowing his drunken past, continually condemn him and point a finger of blame and shame? Or do we celebrate his story of redemption with him, while still wisely acknowledging the problems of the past in an effort not to fall back into that behavior?

SB 683 seeks only to condemn. There must be balance. Yes, acknowledge what was wrong, but there must be credit given for the redemptive good—that is the greater message that will lift and inspire our youth for a better future.