

#1576 How Florida's education reform works to maintain unjust power imbalances

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall take a look at the education curriculum reforms currently being pushed through in Florida through the lens of the long pattern of choosing to see our history in a way that comforts the comfortable and afflicts the afflicted.

Sources today include Deconstructed, Alex Wagner Tonight, The Muckrake Political Podcast, The I Doubt It Podcast, The Benjamin Dixon Show, The Majority Report, and The Readout, with additional members only clips from Think About It with Michael Leppert, America's Workforce Union Podcast, and Why Now? A Political Junkie Podcast.

And I just want to point out that the first clip you'll be hearing is from Deconstructed, a regular source of ours, but their guest is Christopher Ruffo, one of the people leading the conservative effort to remake Florida education in their own image. So... Not a regular source of ours, but someone who's worth [00:01:00] hearing from to fully understand the contrasting perspectives.

Meet the Man Driving the Right's Culture War Panic - Deconstructed - Air Date 7-28-23

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: What's big in the news lately is his new curriculum that Florida rolled out around African-American history.

CHRISTOPHER RUFO: Sure.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: The thing that the media has really fixated on is; teachers are supposed to instruct kids that slaves learned skills. That some slaves learned some skills that they could potentially use in other aspects of their life.

Setting that aside, I feel like that's better understood in the broader way that the curriculum approaches the history, which is; it felt to me like some dorm room

arguments I'd heard from conservatives back in college in the '90s. You hear things like look, they had slavery in Africa also, before they had — And then look, actually slavery was worse in the Caribbean. Which, true, it was. Look, being a serf in Europe, that was really bad too.

All of it, coupled with the slaves learned some skills that they could use later — all of it brought together feels like saying; yes, obviously slavery was bad but [00:02:00] relatively speaking, maybe it wasn't as bad as people say. So is that where the conservative embrace of CRT ends up going? And why?

CHRISTOPHER RUFO: I don't think so. You still hear those arguments today, right? You've heard them, I've heard them. Many of them are based in facts, as you say, but I think they're ultimately not —

That's

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: all in the curriculum. Those things that I heard in the dorm room, all of these things, there was slavery in Africa. It's all true, but it's like, why?

CHRISTOPHER RUFO: I think that— to take the point of this line that has caused controversy — And really, I think, you and I would both agree that the left-wing critique is that; DeSantis is saying that slaves benefited from slavery. No, that's not what it means.

What I think the point is, and this is actually has a long lineage in African-American — it's really the kind of — within American Black philosophy, and political theory, and activism, there is a strand of [00:03:00] thinking that says; the solution — and Thomas Sowell, you can bring it back to Booker T. Washington — but there is a strand of thinking that says; the attitude that should be prioritized is one of resiliency, is one of hope, is one of triumph over adversity. Yes, when you oversimplify it can be a ridiculous Horatio Alger story. It can minimize some of the historical inequities, really and truly.

I think that line was basically to say; these people who suffered under unimaginable brutality and evil conditions were resilient, they had capacities, they had talents. Even though they were smothered and held back under the system of slavery, which was evil and wrong, they were able to emerge from those immense difficulties and actually have capacities that they could realize once [00:04:00] slavery was over.

I traveled in the deep south as I was making the film. One of the things that really shocked me and was really quite inspiring was; in the Mississippi Delta, there was these free cities that were all Black. Small cities and towns that were established by freed slaves. They had their own kind of thriving industries and economies in still some very difficult conditions. They had businesspeople, they had civic leaders, you can see all the old history, and I talked to folks about the history of these places.

To me, that was a triumph of spirit, and of ingenuity, and of resilience, and in courage. I think that you can't tell a story that is only that, right? You can't minimize what these people faced, and we should confront it honestly and totally. Also, you should not minimize these accomplishments, which are not trivial by any measure, and should not [00:05:00] be covered over by people today who see them as an impediment to their own left-wing politics. I think that's so — in the textbooks in places, even in the Deep South, those stories should also be highlighted. I think those stories are quite effective.

My opposition to, let's say, on these issues, right? Race issues. My opposition to Critical Race Theory, it's been hashed out, anyone can go see my opposition. For something kind of new: the opposition to, let's say, even something like reparations, or something like affirmative action, stems from my observations in a place like Memphis. Where I really saw [that] the more that the government and the state seeks to engineer social outcomes on these crude measures, actually, the worse things get.

For me, after that long observation, I just feel very skeptical that these social engineering projects — the government can do pretty [00:06:00] good physical engineering. The New Deal taught us that. Some of those bridges are still American landmarks. Social engineering is something quite different, and we've never been able to do it successfully. I'm quite skeptical in that regard.

RYAN GRIM - HOST, DECONSTRUCTED: If you're still helping with the curriculum, if they're still working on it, I'd suggest adding in something on Robert Smalls. In general, talking about slave uprisings and resistance. To couple it with; good that somebody became a blacksmith, but also talk about the kind of way that there was constant effort to overthrow slavery from the enslaved people themselves.

**DeSantis culture war drives AP Psychology out of Florida schools - Alex Wagner
Tonight - Air Date 8-4-23**

GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS: That's part of our course catalog. It's being offered. I think they have taken it back. I think that's a mistake, and I'll bet you it'll end up being offered.

ALEX WAGNER - HOST, ALEX WAGNER TONIGHT: That is governor Ron DeSantis today, pushing back on an earlier announcement from the College Board that Florida's Department of Education had effectively banned AP psychology in the state, because AP Psychology violates Florida's Parental Rights and [00:07:00] Education Act, that is also known as the Don't Say Gay law.

The College Board, which administers the AP courses, said in a statement yesterday that Florida's school districts are free to teach AP psychology only if it excludes any mention of sexual orientation and gender identity. The College Board said it cannot modify the course in response to laws that would censor college-level standards.

But the idea of no more AP psychology in the entire state of Florida has stirred up some controversy here. So the Florida Education Commissioner just a few hours ago fired back with the statement insisting that the department believes that AP psychology can be taught in its entirety in a manner that is age and developmentally appropriate.

But that sort of leaves a lot of questions there, doesn't it? Specifically, what does the state of Florida think is "age and developmentally appropriate," and does that involve any mention of sexual orientation and gender identity? Now, so far, the College Board is focused on the part of the statement [00:08:00] that says, AP psychology may be taught in its entirety, but what does that actually mean for the teachers who need to begin school in a matter of weeks?

Joining me now is Rachel Chapman, a high school teacher in Orlando, Florida, who has been teaching AP psychology for the past 17 years. Ms. Chapman, thank you for being here. I know it is not easy to talk, perhaps critically, about what's going on in the state of Florida if you are employed in the state of Florida. So I really appreciate you coming on television tonight. Let me just first ask, what is going on in your classroom? How are you preparing for the next year?

RACHEL CHAPMAN: It's kind of difficult right now because everything is still up in the air. There's a lot of change, a lot of movement still happening, so there's a still great unknown to what is this year going to be looking like.

Our students start next week and we're still not entirely sure what's going to happen. And this new information coming from the state, it's kind of muddying the waters a little bit, so it's really difficult for me to prepare in the way that's necessary [00:09:00] for my students starting next week.

ALEX WAGNER - HOST, ALEX WAGNER TONIGHT: For people who didn't take AP Psych -- I'm one of them -- can you just explain why it's necessary to have content that addresses gender and sexual orientation in an AP psych class?

RACHEL CHAPMAN: Excellent. AP psychology is all about the study of the human mind and behavior. And when we try to understand human behavior, we need to look at it from multiple lenses. And by looking at it through these multiple lenses, we can understand all of humanity. And to take out bits and pieces, we're missing out important aspects about what makes psychology, psychology; what makes us us. So it's not like a pick and choose. We can't just decide we're going to look at certain parts of ourselves. We need to look at all of it.

ALEX WAGNER - HOST, ALEX WAGNER TONIGHT: What do you think is behind the state saying Yeah, you can't do that anymore in an AP psychology class in the state of Florida. I mean, what does that signal to you?

RACHEL CHAPMAN: It's really difficult [00:10:00] to really interpret what they mean. We don't know if they're doing that because they don't want discussion at all about gender and sexuality. We don't know if they want a reduced -- what do they want? And when we hear that message from them not to include it, it really makes me wonder, do we want all discussion about these individuals out of the classroom entirely?

ALEX WAGNER - HOST, ALEX WAGNER TONIGHT: To the outside world, this reminds me of the Stop Woke Act, which really chilled any discussion of race, racism, institutional racism, slavery, basic sort of questions about how you teach history in the state of Florida are up for grabs because of the vagueness of the law and the haphazard way with which it's enforced. And I wonder if the same might be happening in the field of psychology or the teaching of AP psychology in classes, that it remains purposefully vague to have effectively a chilling effect on teachers and lesson plans. Are you worried about your ability to teach [00:11:00] going forward?

RACHEL CHAPMAN: I do have concerns. Teachers love clarification. Teachers thrive on information. And we need that clarification to make sure that

we are not ourselves going to be getting into trouble. Walking on eggshells in the classroom is never helpful for students. It's not going to help them understand what we're trying to talk about. So clarification is so important. The vagueness of what's happening right now is really putting us in a situation where we cannot prepare and we can't teach effectively.

ALEX WAGNER - HOST, ALEX WAGNER TONIGHT: This is obviously not the only AP course that's come under fire in terms of, or intersected with, Governor DeSantis's agenda. The same is true notoriously for the AP African-American Studies class. I kind of wonder: if you start targeting these advanced placement courses and the students who take them, what does that say about the level of education in Florida? What does that do to parents who are looking to get a great education for their kids in Florida public schools? Does it make them want to [00:12:00] take their kids out? What are you hearing from parents whose children are victims of the sort of culture war agenda here?

RACHEL CHAPMAN: It's complicated, because there are many parents who are concerned. Are their students going to be competitive when it comes to college? Are they going to be competitive when it comes to career readiness? But at the same times, I really wanna let people know that Florida teachers are hard workers. We're really good at what we do and we are gonna do what we can to do what is best for the students to make sure they're getting the highest quality education that we are able to give them.

We Actually Have To Explain To DeSantis Why Slaves Didn't Benefit From Slavery - The Muckrake Political Podcast - Air Date 7-25-23

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL PODCAST: One of the thing that's coming out of one of our favorite states, that's right the state of Florida everybody, is that; Florida education, in its continuous unending war againsts woke, is now going to push for educational standards that are going to portray the enslavement of human beings — chattel slavery, that is right. They're going to say that slavery was actually very beneficial to the enslaved. Much like having an internship, they learned some lessons, [00:13:00] they gained some skills. It actually, there are both sides to this issue. It's an incredible thing. Is it not?

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Oh, no. Oh no. Don't say any of that. Please. You're making me upset.

It's interesting. Would you like to hear what the retort was to the criticism of this new — because I kind of wanna jump right to that. I feel like it's interesting to hear what the right will say about this. 'Cause, again, the idea that slave slaves would've benefited from the skills they might've learned as slaves in their linger lives is really not about that — can I just read this real quick too?

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Nick, I'll say this. I will only listen to the retort as long as it is even handed reasonable and will not upset.

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Well let's find out. This is from foxnews.com, because I happened to stumble upon that when I was doing my research.

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: That's my homepage, so let's go.

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Okay, good, and you're not lying. " There have been questions raised about language within a benchmark clarification of standard that says blah, blah, blah, which says instruction includes; how slaves [00:14:00] develop skills, which in some business can be applied for their personal benefit." The statement reads, "the intent of this particular benchmark clarification is to show that some slaves developed highly specialized trades, which they benefited."

This is factual and well documented. Some examples include; blacksmiths like Ned Cobb, Henry Blair, Lewis Latimer, John Henry. Shoemakers like; James Ford and shoemakers Paul Cuffe and Betty Washington Lewis. Fishing and shipping industry workers like; Jupiter Hammon, John Chavis, William Whipper and Crispus Attucks.

Tailors like; Elizabeth Keckley, James Thomas and Marietta Carter. Teachers like; Betsy Stockton, and Booker T. Washington, because nothing says education, learn how to be an educator, than being a slave, right?

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: That's literally like saying, there was a good side to genocide, a lot of real estate opened up. It's the absolute most insane thing, and to even propose

it in the first place is an absolutely indefensible thing. I wanna give people a quick little lesson. I talked [00:15:00] about this a little bit in the Midnight Kingdom, but if you haven't had a chance to read it yet, this is an example of what's called paternalism.

The idea here that was in the American Confederacy during the slave period, it was the idea that the enslaved were real simple people. They couldn't take care of themselves. It was almost like they had a parental obligation to take care of these poor souls, to put a roof over their heads to make sure they were fed, not educated.

Mind you, we didn't want them reading, in case they like put two and two together and got outta hand. It was this idea that these were subhumans that needed to be taken care of by their white slave masters. In other words, white supremacy is built on a foundation of believing that you are actually helping people, you are actually teaching them skills.

You are actually making sure that their lives are better than they would be, if they were back in Africa, or if with they were with their families, or if they had freedom. This is only a new iteration of it, and it is as [00:16:00] insidious as it sounds.

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Especially if they weren't being tortured and maimed and killed in the middle.

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: And sexually assaulted.

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: So it really is disgusting, and we've talked about this before, and how — and by the way, this isn't in a vacuum. If you were to examine, I know you have the teaching standards in the South particularly of slavery in general, I think you'd find decades upon decades of this type of thing happening. Where they try to soften the effects of slavery and what slavery meant so as not to make white people feel bad about it. When in fact, I think that's the point. I think we all should feel bad about it, so we don't fucking do it again.

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL

PODCAST: Yeah, we should probably learn from slavery, and genocide, and exploitation, and all of these awful things. You're absolutely right about the South. One of the reasons why the education systems are so abysmal is because

it's an intentionality. It's actually making sure that nobody can take a look at the way things [00:17:00] are. It's not a coincidence that these deviations from what it's like in the North, and the West, and the East, and all that.

It's no coincidence that they happen to take place in things like, again, slavery during the antebellum period, the civil rights period, in which people were murdered and beaten and oppressed. In all of these sort of ways that the South has manifested white supremacy, as much if not more than these other places — I will also say while we're on this subject; I lived in Georgia for a decade and I have to tell you, very early on I wanna say it was only a few months of getting there, I noticed that these are the conversations that are always happening. It's not just a caricature. There are lots of conversations about not just the War of Northern aggression, and how, the South was actually just a lost cause. It was a beautiful time.

It was also a conversation about how; Black people, they like to complain about what happened during slavery, but a lot of them actually had it better than they have it now. It's a narrative that [00:18:00] perpetuates, and not only is it keeping people from feeling guilty, it's keeping any type of progress and any type of addressing of this inequality — which is intentional, from ever being addressed. It is a strategy, and what's happening right now is that strategy is being advanced.

"Heat Wave!, PragerU in Florida Schools, and Robot Ron DeSantis." - I Doubt It Podcast - Air Date 7-28-23

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Florida is now using PragerU content in public school classrooms.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Making it available and in encouraging educators to utilize Dennis Prager, quote unquote "university," right-wing unhinged clips in a classroom to indoctrinate -- that's what this is, to indoctrinate -- children with lies and propaganda about the white-washed version of history.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: And we want you to be fully informed about what this means. So we're gonna start with a promotional video that the PragerU CEO, Marissa Streit, posted on the Prager account on YouTube, notifying parents her [00:19:00] excitement that Florida is now going to be using PragerU videos. And I want you to listen to the language that this

woman uses when she is describing the content that will now be shown in public schools.

MARISSA STREIT: Friends, I'm ecstatic to make this groundbreaking announcement. PragerU is now making it into schools. A couple of years ago, we launched PragerU Kids because parents have been frustrated, teachers have been frustrated. We have seen that our schools have been hijacked by the left. They have been politicized. They have been used by union bosses. They have been doing everything under the sun, not for our children. And so we have launched PragerU Kids and we started providing great edutainment, educational entertainment for children across America. But we didn't just stop there. Now we are actually making turnkey curriculum content for your schools.

And the state of Florida just announced that we are now becoming [00:20:00] an official vendor. This means that if you are a teacher in Florida, you cannot be fired for using PragerU content. You can also rely on our resources in your classrooms.

And we are just getting started. Additional states are signing up.

Go to our website, PragerU.com and find out which other states have been working closely with us so that we become an approved vendor in additional states across America.

You should know that the left is trying to fight us. They're trying to take us out of the schools, and we need your support. So please go to PragerU.com and signed our petition to keep PragerU in schools.

We know that you know that our content is clean, it's great, it's patriotic. We teach civics. We teach financial literacy. We teach goodness and wisdom and all of the things that should have been taught in schools but are not. And so help us stay in schools, help us make it into your schools. Go to PragerU.com, find out how you can get involved, and help us fight for [00:21:00] America's kids.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Do we need to teach patriotism? Do we need to teach those values? Is that the role of education? Aren't we supposed to teach the truth, the accurate history? Not propaganda that they're celebrating that they're making it into schools and oh, by the way, now you can't be fired.

What, what is happening?

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Yeah. it's scary stuff. I spent two hours watching PragerU videos.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Better you than me, sister.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: And let me tell you, they have interesting segments. Not that they're good. I'm saying that they are created to appeal to kids. They're very colorful.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Yeah.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: They have a series that we're gonna play a lot from, Leo and Layla. They travel all over the world. They time travel. They have a little remote where they type in a place or a person and then they travel there and they talk to Martin Luther King Jr., all these different people, which we're gonna get --

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Booker T.
[00:22:00] Washington.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Yeah. But they also have a segment where it's like Around the World, I think is what it's called. And they go to different locations. The one in Canada, they criticize the healthcare system in Canada.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Of course.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: And in LA they talked about the police. That was the topic of the one in Los Angeles.

And we're not gonna play a large part of this, but I wanna give the audience a flavor for how they describe George Floyd. We know how George Floyd was killed by Derek Chauvin. He was choked. Derek Chauvin's knee was on George Floyd's neck for 10 minutes. We know how he died.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Derek Chauvin, convicted of murder for this offense.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Right. Now that you know that, and your memory has been refreshed, I want you to hear how the Prager Kids lesson will teach kids about George Floyd.

PRAGERU CLIP: Then in May, 2020, George Floyd, a black man who resisted arrest and was held under the knee of a police officer, [00:23:00] died while in custody.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Died while in custody.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: I was not ready for that. Died -- while in custody -- by a man who was convicted for his murder, not for manslaughter or whatever lesser charge. Murder.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Mm-hmm.

JESSE DOLLEMORE - HOST, I DOUBT IT PODCAST: But this is what they wanna teach children. We could end it right there and everybody could be satisfied that our claim that this is propaganda and lies in just a conservative narrative. They would get it.

BRITTANY PAGE - I DOUBT IT PODCAST: Yeah. And they're gonna teach kids this. They're gonna teach young people, some teacher in Florida is excited that they're able to show these videos. And a kid may learn about George Floyd for the first time from this video, and that is what they're gonna come away believing.

It's horrifying.

Why a Leftist is Defending Conservatives Over Desantis' Racist Florida Curriculum - The Benjamin Dixon Show - Air Date 7-30-23

BENJAMIN DIXON - HOST, THE BENJAMIN DIXON SHOW: Byron Donalds, who is the Congressman from the 19th Congressional District of Florida. He has come under fire, [00:24:00] not by me, but by the Ron DeSantis campaign because Byron Donalds had the unmitigated gall to call out, and again let me not say call out —

His response to Ron DeSantis' new curriculum stating that Black people, or enslaved people, benefited from slavery, it was really timid. It was gentle. Let me read for you what Byron Donald said that got him to be the target of the DeSantis campaign. This is what he said on Twitter, "The new African-

American standards in Florida are good, robust and accurate. That being said, the attempt to feature the personal benefits of slavery is wrong and needs to be adjusted. That obviously wasn't the goal, and I have faith that the Florida Department of Education will correct this."

Listen, this is lighter than a slap on the wrist. He did everything he could to [00:25:00] gently massage the criticism, the critique. To say; white conservatives, I don't wanna fall outta grace with you. I'm not trying to get out of line, but this is just the bridge too far. Christina Pushaw, who is the social media director for Ron DeSantis, this is what she said on Twitter and ratioed him.

She said, "Did Kamala Harris write this tweet?" Now to be fair to her, which I don't have to be, that was the mildest response of all the conservatives. This is another response saying quote, "You'll never get my vote again. Sell out." Another one said, "You really have sold out for Trump."

Then another said, "It didn't take you long to sell out, did it?" then another said, "Here comes the sell out. Pathetic dude. Pathetic." What Byron Donald said was so mild. He's basically saying; you got a 99% Ron [00:26:00] DeSantis on your curriculum, but that 1% difference is something that I feel like you can correct, and would you please, sir, please consider correcting it?

The DeSantis campaign said hell no. DeSantis supporters said, get in line, get back. So much for all the times I've heard Byron Donalds call Black people who vote Democratic, and he says that they're on the plantation of the Democratic party. Who's being whipped? Ron DeSantis has responded to Byron Donald's mild criticism of the language in the New Florida curriculum. This was his response to Donald's:

GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS: At the end of the day, you gotta choose, are you gonna side with Kamala Harris and liberal media outlets? Are you gonna side with the state of Florida? I think it's very clear that these guys did a good job on those standards. It wasn't anything that was politically motivated.

These are serious scholars. You've seen Dr. Allen out on TV talking about the stories, talking about his own [00:27:00] family history and everything like that. So don't side with Kamala on that. Stand up.

BENJAMIN DIXON - HOST, THE BENJAMIN DIXON SHOW: So Ron DeSantis is now telling Black conservatives not to stand up for their Blackness, but rather stand up for his particular Florida curriculum.

He's not siding with Kamala Harris. I can certainly tell you that. If you ask any Black conservative what they think about Kamala Harris, they are not siding with Kamala Harris. Ron DeSantis, they're siding with their Blackness. They're siding with the reality that under no circumstances should we try to cast a single facet of slavery in a positive light.

Here is Matt Walsh from The Daily Wire. This is what he said on Twitter, "Any Republican who repeats Kamala Harris talking points loses huge amounts of credibility. Very disappointed to see from Byron Donalds. The curriculum briefly mentions that some slaves utilize skills after being freed. This is objectively true and, 'we shouldn't teach it because it hurts my feelings' isn't a legitimate or respectable position."

See [00:28:00] Byron, see what they really think about you. The fact that the truth about what happened after slavery is just almost as bad as what happened during slavery. The amount of laws that were wielded against us to block us from making any progress on our own, the amount of violence that came down on Black people after they were freed.

How many Black people had to stay because they had no other they were not given any resource. They were freed to say, go and be on your own accord. Just survive on your own. Then to try to frame it — I should not have even argued this from the position of where Matt Walsh was trying to argue. He's trying to argue that last generation, how many generations before that lived and died in slavery without the opportunity to utilize any of the skills that were passed down to them from generation to generation? Because we had skills when we arrived here. When you brought us here. The cruelty is the point, right? I think they enjoy [00:29:00] pouring salt into the open wound that is America's original sin.

My original take was almost to just say, you know what Black conservatives? I told you. You know what, I can admit when I needed to shift and change a little bit because despite the fact that I disagree with the politics of these Black conservatives, I can't help but to be extremely proud of the fact that, when the rubber met the road, these partic — not all Black conservatives, but these Black conservatives, Byron Donald, who I have never said a kind thing about.

I have to admit that I am proud of this brother taking a stand against Ron DeSantis at the risk of his own career. The rest of Byron Donald's politics suck. He still supports Donald Trump, but when it came down to his Blackness he said, "No, I'm gonna draw the line here." So I salute that brother, even if it's in a limited sense.

You even have a Senator Tim Scott, who came out and said the exact thing. That there's no [00:30:00] reason for anyone to try to cast a single component of slavery as something positive. Listen, have you ever heard me say something positive about Tim Scott? I would be remiss, it would be a shame on my Blackness, if I allowed my disdain for all of the rest of their politics to make me ignore the fact that in this moment they're speaking the truth.

Listen, listen to this clip. I apologize for the quality of the audio. It's a little difficult to hear, but if you listen closely, Tim Scott is speaking the truth.

SENATOR TIM SCOTT: As a country founded upon the freedom, greatest deprivation of freedom for slavery. There's no silver lining in freedom and slavery.

The truth is that anything you can learn, any benefits that people suggest you had during slavery, you would've had as a free person. Slavery was really about separating families, about mutilating humans, and even raping their wives. It was just devastating. So I would hope that every person [00:31:00] in our country, and certainly running for president, would appreciate that.

Listen, people have bad days. Sometimes they regret what they say and we should ask them again to clarify their positions.

BENJAMIN DIXON - HOST, THE BENJAMIN DIXON SHOW: They did ask them again and see, this is where I started parting ways with my conservative brothers and sisters. I part ways with them because they are giving Ron DeSantis too much of the benefit of the doubt.

Fox News BUSTED For Rewriting History Of Slavery - The Majority Report - Air Date 7-26-23

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Jesse Watters spoke with William Allen. He's one of the authors of the curriculum. He is apparently a political scientist, not a historian, but again, irrelevant.

Here is Allen trying to make his case.

JESSE WATTERS: Now one of the authors of the Florida curriculum, Dr. William Allen, joins me now. So Dr. Allen, why do you think Kamala Harris is being dishonest about what's being taught about slavery?

DR. WILLIAM ALLEN: Permit me not to give you Kamala Harris's motives. They're invisible. I don't know them. We can all have suspicions that there's a dishonest purpose afoot. But what's more important than that [00:32:00] dishonest purpose is the truth. And this curriculum is devoted to telling the truth, whereas Kamala Harris has retailed a lie. Now, it may only have been a falsehood the first time she stated it, but when you repeat a falsehood, it becomes a lie.

JESSE WATTERS: Tell her right now what specifically this component of the slavery course teaches.

DR. WILLIAM ALLEN: Well, permit me to have Frederick Douglass tell her. He wrote an autobiography in which he described how the mistress of his slave owner began to teach him to read. She pulled back the curtain through which a glimmer of light shown before the master forced her to close it. But that glimmer of light was enough for Frederick Douglass to illumine a bright flame that he exploited to his benefit and his country's benefit thereafter. Such examples are numerous and they're retailed in the stories of people who suffered the indignity of [00:33:00] slavery time and again.

And quickly permit me to say what this curriculum is about is having people who live the experience, who live the history, tell their stories. And nothing is more important than that. We never, ever erase the stories that the people who live the stories tell.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: All right. So first off, again, let's just even take what this guy's saying. And you notice the flowery language that he needs to obscure, he needs the, the flame, the passion, blah, blah, blah.

The implication is that Douglass would not have learned to read were he not a slave. But the reality is it's the opposite. That there not only would Frederick Douglass not have to rely on the mistress of the master to make him see the concept of reading, start this light, and [00:34:00] we're gonna examine even that question. But just even if we were stipulate that she was to sit down with him for years and taught him to read and taught him grammar and taught him all these things, well, there's every reason to believe that if Douglass was not a slave he would've had an opportunity to read. It wouldn't have been disallowed.

In fact, there would be more than Frederick Douglass. There would be many Frederick Douglasses who would have learned to read, but for slavery. So the real question isn't whether slavery allowed for skills that benefited them. The real question is, but for slavery, would these people have had skills? And the answer is undoubtedly no. No, no, no. There's not a "but for slavery," no, it is, but for slavery, there would be a lot more people with skills.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: The fact that the skills were honed is not because of [00:35:00] slavery. It is in spite of slavery.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Exactly. Exactly.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: This guy was a Reagan appointee as the chair of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. I couldn't find too much about him, so I just went to good old Wikipedia and there you go. Appointed by Reagan and then Bush, the first.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: This Twitterer, they are a Texas A&M statistics PhD student. We'll pop it up. They did a tweet thread on William [Frederick] Douglass, the way that *he* presents it within the context of his biography. And you can scroll down here. We're not gonna go through the whole thing, but bottom line is, yes, his mistress, who he says, had no experience in slavery before she married his master, and therefore was open to the idea of introducing to him literally the alphabet. And then not only did she stop teaching him when her husband [00:36:00] said, stop doing that -- this is Mr. And Mrs. Auld -- " she assisted me in learning to spell three or four letters, words of three or four letters, like "dog," maybe " cat." And then once she was forbade from doing it, you can scroll down to where it gets into the capitalize. It was in fact not those letters that she taught him. Rather it was when the master said this: "What was going on? At once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her among other things that it was unlawful as well as unsafe to teach a slave to read, to use his own words further, he said, 'If you give an [N-word] an inch, he will take an L. An [N-word] should know nothing but to obey his master to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best [N-word] in [00:37:00] the world. Now,' said he, 'if you teach that [N-word],' speaking of myself," that being Douglass, "how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." And then Douglass goes on to write, "These words sank deep into my heart. These words" -- remember that -- "these words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation explaining dark and mysterious

things with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty, to wit the White man's power to enslave the Black man. It was a grand achievement and I prized it [00:38:00] highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I least expected it. While I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction, which by the nearest accident I had gained from my master."

In other words, the true inspiration for him to read came from not the alphabet that he was taught by his mistress, not the three letter words that he was taught, but by the understanding that it was the master preventing him from reading, which was keeping him mentally and physically enslaved.

Then he went on to learn to read in secret because had he not had that revelation, his use of three-letter [00:39:00] words or the alphabet would probably have just been of some minor utility to him in his enslaved duties.

‘I was teaching before he was born’: Professor slams DeSantis for quashing Black history education - The Reidout - Air Date 1-23-23

JOY REID - HOST, THE REIDOUT: Your book is called *A History of Florida Through Black Eyes*. It contains photos that were unearthed over 50 years of research, documenting lynchings and other crimes against black folks in Florida. You also donated a collection in 4,000 photos to FIU, Florida International University, which I know very well. Is your book, in your view, in your mind, as you understand this "Stop Woke Act", is it legal to teach your book in Florida schools?

DR MICHAEL DUNN: Oh, no. No, no. If a teacher in Florida schools was caught taking this book to school, he or she could be fired, could be charged with a felony. This book is not allowed in Florida schools because it touches on the very things that DeSantis wants hidden from Florida students. So, no, this book is not admitted, could not be admitted, into the Florida classroom. That's part of what we're facing here in [00:40:00] this crisis. I was teaching at Florida International University before Ron DeSantis was born. Now he sidles up to me and tells me what I can't teach in my classroom. Excuse me, sir, you're not my boss. You're not the boss of me. Uh, this man, when he taught school for a very

brief period of time, some of his students claim that Ron DeSantis taught the Civil War as if the Confederates had a point, that they had lost property. Some of his students said that Ron DeSantis taught them that abortion was wrong. Now he's teaching this in his classes, his political agenda, his personal agenda. Now he comes as governor and tells us we can't teach unless we respect what he prescribes as very, very rigid rules of academic freedom. He's a hypocrite. He's an absolute hypocrite. And what he's doing, frankly, is just totally destroying education in Florida. I dare this man to show me one school in Florida where Critical Race Theory is being taught. Just one school, one school in Florida where students are being told, Feel [00:41:00] bad because of something someone did 200 years ago. Where is that happening, Ron? He cannot point out what... this is all made up. It's fake. Aimed at getting him to the White House. This man is running for president and using race as a cudgel to beat the votership over the head.

JOY REID - HOST, THE REIDOUT: To your very point, I mean, the things that they claim are their concerns, because you've already had Florida's College Board rejected, the African-American studies course rejected. You've had Florida schools that are under the, you know, sort of the regime of the governor come back and say, No, no, no. We promise we're not teaching Critical Race Theory in our schools. As you said, they don't. But they've already backed down and said that they won't do it. You actually went right at Ron DeSantis. You are one of the members, uh, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit that is trying to challenge the Stop Woke Act. You tweeted references to your own family's history at Ron DeSantis, and you said to him, This is the history of my own family. These are the things that we have dealt with: [00:42:00] collecting used books from all-White schools because they couldn't be allowed to have new books; being on the migrant trails in the 1940s; your father not being allowed to be a cook in the Navy during World War II because he was Black. Have you received a response from Ron DeSantis on the challenges you put forward about your own history?

DR MICHAEL DUNN: Not a word. I wrote to Ron and to Manny Díaz asking them, What kinds of things am I not allowed to teach? How am I supposed to teach the Holocaust without feelings? How am I supposed to teach slavery without feelings? How am I to explain to students a woman having her baby snatched from her and sold out to someone else and not express my sense that that's evil? So, what we're being asked to do is to super-sterilize American history, to take race out of it and act as if race wasn't a factor. If DeSantis had his way in the teaching of slavery, for example, slavery in Florida would be taught, uh some Africans came over, worked for free for a while, and that was it. That's slavery. [00:43:00] Mentioning [that] some people took some people and killed them. That's it. Take the race out of it. He is so determined to kill our

history that it just makes me and others even more determined to save it and to protect it. I don't shrink from DeSantis. He is a bully. He is an autocrat and he is a little guy trying to become a big guy. He's a baby Trump. And I think the people of this country will recognize that, particularly when they see what he's gonna do to our schools, if he becomes president.

It's hard to vilify DEI training, without announcing one's racism - Think About It with Michael Leppert - Air Date 8-1-23

MICHAEL LEPPERT - HOST, THINK ABOUT IT: If the average American were to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion training through its discussion in the political arena of alone. Suspicion of it should be expected, and hostility toward it would be understandable.

Duh. That applies to just about everything these days. On July 21st, vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Jacksonville, Florida to object to that state's newly approved standards for how Black history is taught. The new instruction will teach, quote, how slaves developed skills, which in [00:44:00] some instances could be applied for their personal benefit end quote, the objection to the benefit of slavery in the standard led to Governor Ron DeSantis initially claiming it was the Florida Department of Education who wrote it, not him.

But that only lasted for a moment before he realized there was an opportunity for a fight here. DeSantis quickly pivoted to defend the controversial language and attack anyone who didn't like it. That predictable and disgusting position got more complicated when the highest profile black Republican elected officials cited with Harris.

Florida representative Byron Donalds, the state's only black member of Congress, objected first followed by other black members of the house, representative John James of Michigan, and Representative Wesley Hunt of Texas, even presidential candidates. Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina joined the objectors again, duh.

The language in the Florida standards is racist. Plain and simple. It is so clearly [00:45:00] racist. It is silly to even debate it. Delete it. Apologize for it. Learn from it. Move on. The Florida d o e could use some training in d e I. Acronyms are easy to villainize in our post fact culture. It's easy to hate DEI when the first primary and constant things one hears about it are that it is bad, that it is a ploy to take something away from someone, that it is a conspiracy to harm.

Just as Americans didn't know what social distancing or coronaviruses were before 2020, that was also the year that DEI entered our mainstream vernacular. In the wake of racial justice riots, following the killing of George Floyd, organizations of all kinds began investing time, energy, and resources into understanding each other better.

Excellent. There can't be a downside to that. Can there be, let me save some time and just answer that question bluntly. No, there [00:46:00] is no downside. There is no loss to anyone. There is no harm. So what is DEI training? It is an organized educational program that aims to promote awareness and understanding of how people with different backgrounds, cultures, ages, races, genders, sexuality, religions, physical conditions, and beliefs can best work together harmoniously.

I am a communication professor and consultant. It is impossible to train a student to communicate effectively just as it is to serve a client well without a focus on the audience. When delivering messages today, the most obvious error is people focus on what they want to say instead of what they want their audience to hear.

There is a profound difference. Words and tone matter, appearance and posture matter. All kinds of things matter differently to an audience based on who they [00:47:00] are and considering who the audience is when communicating can only help. Likewise, if one wants to be a better listener. Reader or recipient of messages, that same training will also help what doesn't DEI training do?

It doesn't create inequities, unfairness, quotas, or my favorite horror story. It doesn't make any anyone weak. The US House recently passed language banning, DEI initiatives from the military speaker Kevin McCarthy said of the measure quote, A military cannot defend themselves if you train them in woke end quote.

Really, Kev, if the US military, which is similarly diverse as its citizenry, learns to communicate better with each other, it will somehow be less strong, less capable, and less able to defend itself. Even the Florida DOE would have to strain to come up with a curriculum that dumb. Every student in [00:48:00] my graduate school cohort would agree that the most valuable part of our training was the series of seminars re we received on DEI.

All 20 of my classmates learned invaluable lessons on how to connect with people better. And most of us were already professional communicators. Those

expressing hostility toward DEI programs are almost uniformly expressing hostility to the other. And in this context, the other is usually defined by race.

Yes, the hostility is racist. There is nothing being taken from anyone when training them to understand each other better. There is nothing meaningful being risked, committing to do it is not even provocative. It's obvious. It is such a no-brainer. We should find a way to convert the acronym from DEI to duh.

Andrew Spar, Florida Education Association President and Scott Slawson, UE Local 506 President - America's Work Force Union Podcast - Air Date 7-26-23

ANDREW SPAR: The level of vitriol against those of us who work in public education, those of us who are union members in the State of [00:49:00] Florida, is just off the chart. And so what we have right now is yet another attack on a group that the governor, you know, has decided are political adversaries, in this case African-Americans. And what, uh, the State Board of Education recently approved after a very, very short process of about four months, a complete rewrite of the African-American history standards. They put together a work group. Many of them on the work group were appointed by the governor directly. They added a few teachers in to that work group and the work group had to demand to meet. That's how bad it was. The governor was trying to push these through without even the work group really doing anything other than being handed paper, saying sign off on it. And so there was all kinds of controversy even through the process. But these new standards are problematic in so many ways and lemme just quickly say, uh, the difference between what we're seeing now and what they're trying to move to. In elementary school, when you typically have standards, you typically say you want the kids to learn [00:50:00] something. So you'll say things like, Students need to understand, or, Students need to compare and contrast, or, Students need to analyze. Those are common terms used in standards because it shows depth of understanding. And what these standards say in elementary is, Students just need to identify key African-American figures in history. They don't need to know what they did. They don't need to know what their contributions are to society, or why they're important in history. Then it goes on to middle school, which is one that we're hearing a lot about, the most controversial standard where again, it says that slavery may have actually provided a personal benefit to those who were enslaved. This crazy concept that somehow slavery may have been a good thing, is what is in the standard saying teachers must teach that. And it also is

important to point out that from elementary school through eighth grade in Florida now, students will have no formal education under these standards on what's happened in African-American history since the Emancipation Proclamation [00:51:00] 150 years ago, since Reconstruction. And so that's concerning as well. And then high school, the standards have these massive gaps. For example, it talks about *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark ruling from the Supreme Court ending segregation, but it leaves out the fact that Florida, as well as many other states, pass laws saying that the Supreme Court ruling was null and void in our state, and that it took years before segregation actually ended in Florida. That whole part of history, which is important, especially living in the State of Florida, is left out. And that's just one of many examples where we see massive gaps in the learning and it seems like an intentional whitewashing of these standards. And, you know, as people, as an educator, as someone who cares about our country there's that old saying, If we don't learn from our history, we're destined to repeat it. And that's of course one of the driving concerns around these standards. It's [00:52:00] a revisionist history, a whitewashing, again, of what should be taught in schools and it's deplorable in a lot of senses.

ED "FLASH" FERENC - HOST, AMERICA'S WORK FORCE UNION

PODCAST: So, Andrew, this just happened and this was the Florida Board of Education, and here we are, um, it's gonna be August in a couple of days. School's gonna start. When is this all supposed to take effect? I mean, did they expect this to happen, like, in a couple of weeks, or what? Or is there gonna be some pushback on this?

ANDREW SPAR: There's definitely pushback. We're working with a lot of groups, including the NAACP and other groups called, another group in Florida called Equal Ground, and another group called Florida Rising, and a bunch of other groups, League of Women Voters and so on. So there's a broad coalition right now working on a strategy regarding to how we push back on this. But the expectation is these standards are gonna start to be implemented this school year. With full implementation next school year. At least that's our understanding. The timing of it is a political timing. It's not an educationally-sound timing. Again, usually when you rewrite standards, you spend at [00:53:00] least a year with groups meeting regularly, going back, writing, having conversation, dialogue, rewriting. None of that happened with these standards. This was just a political move by the governor who wanted to say he rewrote the African-American standards. And it's interesting 'cause he's trying to spin it as if it's a good thing. He's trying to spin it and say that these rewrite of standards is to really add focus to African-American history. It's just the wrong kind of focus, I guess you could say. And even as, I think it was yesterday, the governor came out in a statement saying, trying to distance himself from what

the State Board just did. So, now he's realizing the backlash is pretty severe and he is got his campaign in a tailspin. So, now he's trying to distance himself from something he pushed.

The Court Room of History - Why Now_ A Political Junkie Podcast - Air Date 7-29-23

CLAIRE POTTER - HOST, WHY NOW?: One of the things I loved about this book is it took me back to a conversation we had decades ago about how Southern history isn't really Southern history. It's the history of this nation. And I think the three Lumpkin sisters, in their travels, in what they [00:54:00] embrace, in what they reject, point to the importance of Southern history in understanding our dilemmas today. So, can you tell our listeners why they should read this book now?

JACQUELYN DOWD HALL: Well, you've drawn attention to one of the reasons that I think they should read it, and I remember this conversation you're talking about very well. They should read it to get a different view of the South than the conventional view. The South's cultural impact and political impact goes far beyond the geographical boundaries of the South. You can't ignore the South and write off the South politically, for example, and think you're going to change the country or move the country in a progressive direction. This book is in part about the Southern diaspora, [00:55:00] the diaspora of ideas and people. So much of what we think of, say, even as Southern literature, really is a matter of Southern expatriates with the South in their heart, but living elsewhere in other contexts, looking back, and writing about the South. And that's what these women did. So, in that sense, the South has an impact that goes far beyond the old Confederacy.

Another way in which you might think about the South differently is that the South has played a particular role in the American imagination and the role that it's played is as a kind of repository for racism and backwardness. So, America is innocent and great and victorious. The [00:56:00] South is where we put all the defeat and the poverty and the failure and, as I said, the racism. And that is a really, really self-defeating way of looking at those issues. It's not true, and it gives a false sense of what America is. And one of the big goals that Catherine in particular had, and Grace, too, in her younger and better days was to oppose the idea of a monolithic South and to bring forward a story of the progressive South, a story of different kinds of feminism in the South and, in Catherine's case, she writes about this in a way that I found very brilliant and [00:57:00] touching in her autobiography. She goes through this whole process of things that happened to her, from childhood on, that made her begin to see the South in

a different way. But in the end, as long as she still believed in. The unique, monolithic South, then she felt that to be critical of the South, to be a different kind of Southerner, was to betray the South, not to be a Southerner, that she had to say, you know, had to reject her own family and her own past. And it was when she began to learn about a more complicated Southern history, and Southern history that was not monolithic, that she was able to both affirm herself and her identity and her history and to be a [00:58:00] person of the world and of the country.

Final comments on how education curriculum is helping maintain power imbalances

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today, starting with *Deconstructed*, speaking with Christopher Rufo, giving his conservative perspective on Florida's education curriculum. *Alex Wagner Tonight* discussed the chilling effect of creating uncertainty about what is allowed to be taught. *The Muckrake Political Podcast* explained Florida's efforts as part of a long pattern of attempting to obscure our history. The *I Doubt It* podcast lamented the inclusion of PragerU as approved Florida educational material. *The Benjamin Dixon Show* highlighted the very light pushback by Black conservatives in Florida. *The Majority Report* broke down the story of Frederick Douglass learning to read and highlighted why we should never see slavery as having benefited enslaved people. And *The Reidout* spoke with a Black professor and author of *A History of Florida Through Black Eyes* about Ron DeSantis. That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Think About It with Michael Leppert*, who looked [00:59:00] at the not-so-controversial DEI framework.

MICHAEL LEPPERT - HOST, THINK ABOUT IT: If the average American were to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion training through its discussion in the political arena alone, suspicion of it should be expected and hostility toward it would be understandable. Duh.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: *America's Workforce Union Podcast* looked at Florida's education through the lens of DeSantis's political enemies.

ANDREW SPAR: The level of vitriol against those of us who work in public education, those of us who are union members in the State of Florida, is just off the chart. And so what we have right now is yet another attack on a group that

the governor has decided are political adversaries, in this case African-Americans.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: And *Why Now? A Political Junkie Podcast* discussed the nuances of understanding Southern history.

JACQUELYN DOWD HALL: The South has played a particular role in the American imagination and the role that it's played is [01:00:00] as a kind of repository for racism and backwardness. So, America is innocent and great and victorious. The South is where we put all the defeat and the poverty and the failure and, as I said, the racism. And that is a really, really self-defeating way of looking at those issues.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: To hear that, and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at BestOfTheLeft.com/support or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

Now to wrap up, I just want to point out that this whole topic is a classic example of how a system of power defends itself against critics. The key to doing this is [01:01:00] creating a straw man argument that frames power as being an all-or-nothing situation. This is a completely wrong framing. It makes no sense, but it's really easy to disprove.

So, they use that straw man as their opponent's opinion, they misrepresent their opponent's position, and then everything flows from that misrepresentation. So, right now, I'm thinking mostly of the Black academic who was interviewed on *Fox News* to describe how Frederick Douglass's enslaver's wife began to teach him the fundamentals of reading. Now, they seem to think that by highlighting a story like this, they are breaking through a sort of conspiracy of thought that would otherwise silence this line of teaching. And the simplified version of this straw man argument is this: basically, one side says that slavery is 100% bad, and the contradictory perspective will argue that if anything [01:02:00] ever good happened within the context of slavery, then the first argument must be untrue, or even that the person arguing that slavery is 100% bad doesn't want you to know that anything good could have ever happened under a slave system, partially to, you know, trick you or something like that.

This is a strawman argument because both ideas can be simultaneously true. Slavery can and should be considered as 100% bad, totally unjustifiable, completely irredeemable, and this is not changed by any instance of kindness, for instance, between an enslaved person and their enslaver. The crux of the strawman argument is the all-or-nothing fallacy. They're presenting a sort of cartoon version of a system of oppression that they imagine as being an environment in which nothing good can possibly [01:03:00] happen to the oppressed and everything good must happen to the oppressor. Then, because we don't live in a black and white world and that sort of black and white thinking is obviously not going to be true, they can knock down that straw man and in doing so it puts doubt into the minds of many about the legitimacy of the claims of oppression overall.

In reality, systems of oppression are never all-or-nothing. It's never that the oppressor gets 100% of the benefit and the oppressed gets zero, that nothing ever good happens for them. Because a system like that would topple under the weight of their own, you know, obvious overwhelming injustice. So, there's always a veneer of some sort of justice to give the perception of legitimacy. Now, in the case of slavery that's a really heavy lift to try to find anything that an enslaved person [01:04:00] benefited from, from their enslavement, which is why you always hear the same arguments. Basically, they always come back to, Well, they got free housing. And I think they kind of know that they're scratching the absolute bottom of the barrel there, which is why that wasn't the primary argument used then or now. The primary argument was to completely dehumanize and turn enslaved people into objects of pity so that slavery itself could be looked at as a kindness in the minds of many. Then any action, no matter how small, like teaching Frederick Douglass the alphabet, could be put into that paternalistic frame of helping people who they believed couldn't help themselves.

But as we heard today, that was all a distraction. It zooms in so closely on one set of facts that it actually works to obscure the wider [01:05:00] reality, that teaching an enslaved person to read doesn't soften the institution of slavery, but only highlights the injustice by acting as a reminder that access to reading, a fundamental human right, was systematically denied to enslaved people, specifically as a mechanism to keep them oppressed.

Now, I think knocking down arguments that slavery wasn't so bad is a little too easy, so I'll move to one that I think people have a little bit harder time with, because this pattern plays itself out over and over again, and it did so with patriarchy as well. Patriarchy was designed to grant more power and wealth to men while keeping women subservient, and it was done with the help of cultural norms that were established that appeared to be beneficial to women,

like chivalry, which framed women as weak and in need of help and protection from men. That's how you get things like doors being held open for women [01:06:00] and women and children being rescued from sinking ships first. But the same reasoning was used to keep women out of certain categories of jobs that often paid better or had more power than the jobs they could get hired for. And so the power differential was maintained in favor of men with the help of a veneer of paternalism for women. That's all it takes to give some people the belief that maybe there isn't much of a power differential at all. Maybe it's just differences in how the benefits to each gender are doled out. Now, that's not a correct perspective, but you can see how a relatively reasonable person who doesn't think too hard about it might get tricked into thinking this. And sometimes it's just that small amount of doubt that is enough to help a system of power perpetuate itself while avoiding being challenged too harshly, because enough people have enough doubt that they think, Well, I don't know, do we really need to fight against this? It seems okay. Whereas [01:07:00] if there were a genuine all-or-nothing power dynamic where men had all the power, all the money, had all the doors open for them, got priority rescue from sinking ships, and women were forced to do all of the most dangerous jobs, then the imbalance would be so obvious, the injustice so clear, that reasonable people wouldn't be likely to be fooled by it, and resistance to that system of power would be much more pronounced.

This is what is most important to understand when hearing what can sound like fairly reasonable perspectives about telling Frederick Douglass's full story or framing skills learned during enslavement as having been a benefit that a formerly enslaved person could use to lift themselves up when free. These stories, though there may be technical truth to them, are just another example of this pattern of oppressive power dynamics maintaining themselves by making those with power [01:08:00] feel morally justified in maintaining that imbalance, by obscuring the larger context that is much more important to understand than the specific details of who taught Frederick Douglass to read.

And this isn't just a relic of the past. As we heard today, echoes of these arguments can still be heard about slavery today that impact modern perceptions of Black people as a group, poisoning the discussion today about how to move forward as a society that has still not fully overcome the legacy of slavery, segregation, and structural racism.

That's going to be it for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You can leave us a voicemail or send us a text to 202-999-3991 or simply email me to Jay@BestOfTheLeft.Com Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in

our bonus episodes. Thanks to our transcriptionist trio, [01:09:00] Ken, Brian, and LaWendy, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, webmastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestOfTheLeft.com/support. You can join them now by signing up today. It would be greatly appreciated. And if you want to continue the discussion, join our Discord community. There's a link to join in the show notes.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast, coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show, from BestOfTheLeft.Com.