

## America's History, Uncovered

America gleams, it glitters, it glints! It leads the world in innovation and boasts dozens of successful commercial industries, ranking first globally in various facets including technological ingenuity. It is a beacon of liberty and justice for all, the standard of living for many third world countries. American and foreign students alike learn about our country's rich history every day. But every rose has its thorns, and America is no exception. The darkest part of America's history goes beyond just segregation or slavery: our school curriculum and history books contain only a fraction of the most violent and unspeakable expressions of racism, xenophobia, and homophobia of our country's past.

To name a few: the 1986 My Lai massacre, the Wilmington Coup of 1898, and the 1991 Hamlet fire. If you're unfamiliar, don't feel bad- these events remain unknown to a vast majority of American citizens whose textbooks never covered them.

But the biggest obstacle to inclusive education isn't just a lack of intensive material, but the institutions, individuals, and political groups actively trying to hamper it. Case in point: schools across the country have begun to pass legislation and ban books of certain subjects in an effort to preserve the romanticized vision of America taught in history books.

In fact, there have been so many of these laws passed specifically to restrict education on topics such as race and gender they've received their own name: 'gag orders,' and they've increased by 250% since 2021 (Pen America).

Some of these laws protect school's rights to ban books. Take for example *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, a book that details the life of a Native American teenager living on a Reservation. It's been banned in several schools across Idaho. Not even 'classics' are exempt: schools in Virginia, Mississippi, and California have all challenged *To Kill a Mockingbird*, an indisputably iconic book that delves into racial prejudice of the 1900s.

But it doesn't stop there. According to Pen America, the number of banned books in some states is nearing 1,000- 40% of which feature characters of color and 21% directly address topics of race and racism.

Many who support this movement believe that educating youth on the events of the past is about allocating blame over historical grievances- but that couldn't be further from the truth. It's #USvsHate, not #USvsEachOther, after all. The goal of inclusive teaching is to diminish, not amplify, the divisions between demographics in the US. Learning about America's past in depth is the first step in completely abolishing these divisions and creating a more equal, liberated society.

Besides, trying to bury the past only impedes the collective progression of society as a whole. Gag orders and book bans effectively erase history- and erasing history is an insult not just to those whose lived experiences are being swept under the rug but to the people in the present day who suffer from effects of those experiences.

In other words, prejudice isn't just a distant thing of the past. It's not limited to, say, displacing indigenous people, or not allowing African Americans to ride on buses- it's woven like a sturdy thread into the fabric of our everyday lives, from the internal biases and assumptions about one another we possess to the actions and behaviors in which they're expressed. Expunging prejudice in the current day is impossible without learning from prejudice in the past.

Praises are sung in America's name as "the land of the free"- but how free is our society, really, when our rights don't extend to the books we read? America's history is undeniably dark and uncomfortable to learn about, but today's youth doesn't want an idealized version of the past. They want, and deserve, the truth.

#LetUsLearn.