



THE SPLC’S RADICAL “LEARNING FOR JUSTICE” PROGRAM

WHAT PARENTS, TEACHERS,
AND ADMINISTRATORS NEED TO KNOW

by Meg Kilgannon

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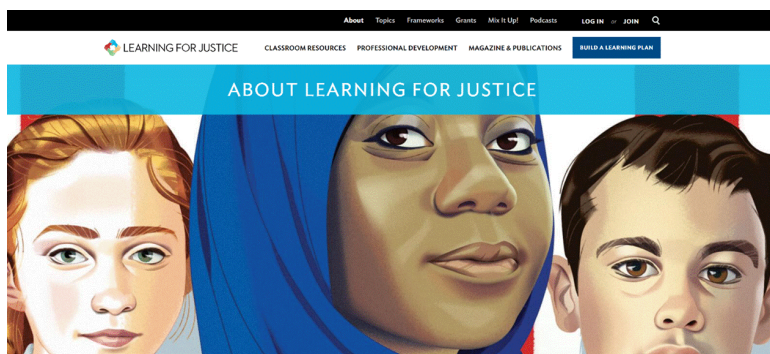
THE SPLC'S RADICAL “LEARNING FOR JUSTICE” PROGRAM

WHAT PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS NEED TO KNOW

When America’s public schools went virtual in 2020 on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents had a front-row seat to observe their children’s education. These parents gained a clearer understanding of what their children are being taught—and how divisive and dangerous some of it is.

Family Research Council (FRC) has created this resource to help parents, teachers, school administrators, and concerned citizens identify and monitor a particular threat to our values and religious freedom: divisive identity politics inserted into school curricula. Often portrayed as “inclusive,” “anti-racist,” or “social justice” education, disputed ideologies like Critical Race Theory (CRT) and gender identity are increasingly being presented as fact in curricula, professional development trainings for teachers, and even policies at the school board level. These ideologies were originally forced upon American schools, but now are seemingly being embraced by public schools across the country.

One of the organizations most responsible for this trend is the highly partisan and left-wing Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and its Learning for Justice (LFJ) initiative.



Formerly called “Teaching Tolerance,” Learning for Justice is a special project run by the SPLC. It is designed to infiltrate schools through radically progressive education resources.

Prompted by a newly stated mission, “to reach our goal of justice for all,”¹ the SPLC rebranded “Teaching Tolerance” to “Learning for Justice.” We know that for the SPLC, the objective is not “justice for all” but rather indoctrinating our children with their progressive worldview. According to an executive at the SPLC, “[w]e are focused, whether people like it or not, on the radical right.”² A former Senior Fellow at the SPLC describes their purpose as not just a “hate monitoring” organization, but in reality, “[o]ur aim in life is to destroy these groups, completely destroy them.”³



Parental rights and Christian values about marriage and family are in the crosshairs of Learning for Justice materials and resources. This booklet outlines the content within the LFJ project and empowers parents to protect their children against indoctrination if such “resources” are discovered in your local school.

With the SPLC’s vast financial holdings and a seemingly limitless budget, Learning for Justice produces hundreds of teacher resources online and in print. The SPLC delivered 900,000 copies of their *Teaching Tolerance* magazine in 2019 alone.⁴ The group’s magazine has been in circulation since

1991.⁵ That's long enough for an entire generation of children influenced by the SPLC agenda to become teachers themselves. We will highlight the content of LFJ later in the brochure, but to put this all into context, we must first review the hateful history of the SPLC itself.

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER: LEFT-WING SCARE TACTICS SPAWN A MEGA FUNDRAISING BULLY

Since its founding in 1971, the Southern Poverty Law Center has been frequently criticized for its questionable financial practices, fundraising scare tactics,⁶ and outsized \$570 million endowment.⁷ More recently, the fundraising behemoth has come under fire for maintaining a longstanding hostile work environment for minorities and women.⁸ Lionized as a master fundraiser unbothered by scruples, SPLC co-founder Morris Dees was fired in March 2019.⁹ Dees had been accused of racism by employees over the years and had a reputation for harassing female employees regardless of race.¹⁰

The “internationally renowned human and civil rights leader” Margaret Huang was hired as Dee’s replacement in 2020.¹¹ As the former executive director of Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), Huang is credited with defending refugees and sufferers of gun violence, torture, and police brutality.¹² Huang’s agenda at the SPLC is neutralizing the “mainstreaming of hate” and “extremism”



*SPLC President and CEO
Margaret Huang*

that was supposedly inspired by President Trump, who she labels as “the prolific promoter of far-right conspiracy and racist tropes.”¹³ She claims that “many leaders in his administration had ties to extremist groups,” which led to the implementation of “policies like the separation of families and the caging of children at the border.”¹⁴ To facilitate the “prevention” of this “far-right extremism,” Huang unashamedly celebrates the

SPLC's collaboration with American University's Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), which produces "curricula and toolkit for parents" to "look out for" their child's exposure to this "hateful ideology."¹⁵ She asserts that "our best hope" is to "prevent young people from finding this [ideology] at all attractive or appealing." Under Huang's guidance, Learning for Justice and the collaboration with PERIL are public tactics to breed a deep hatred for America in children. This is because, in the SPLC's view, the concept of "homeland is central to almost all forms of extremism."¹⁶

The SPLC has been called a "notoriously partisan attack group" by Philanthropy Roundtable.¹⁷ As such, SPLC materials ought to be inappropriate for use in taxpayer-funded public schools. However, the SPLC's established presence and outsized budget for slick mailings of free resources make it hard for educators to resist. Threats of legal action are the SPLC's weapon of choice.¹⁸ The SPLC is well known for threatening and bullying school systems, teachers, and even parents with expensive legal actions and complaints filed with federal and state-level Civil Rights Offices.¹⁹

The SPLC is a highly partisan and ideological organization that cannot be trusted to inform the minds of our nation's children. We will now explore exactly what the SPLC's program Learning for Justice is, who makes it happen, and how it works.

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LEARNING FOR JUSTICE:

DIVISIVE IDENTITY POLITICS AIMED AT CHILDREN

The SPLC's Teaching Tolerance program debuted in 1991. Originally a semiannual magazine, under the leadership

of Director Maureen Costello,²⁰ it grew into a full-fledged teacher training and support program centered around “social justice” activism. Its dramatically increased offerings included professional development, lesson planning, films and film kits, podcasts, and other tools for teachers and school administrators.²¹ In 2021, the Teaching Tolerance project was rebranded as Learning for Justice.

Now under the supervision of Director Jalaya Liles Dunn,²² the program has taken an even more radical approach. In an article on the program website, Dunn explains Learning for Justice was a necessary rebrand because “tolerance is not justice. It isn’t a sufficient description of the work we do or of the world we want.”²³ According to Dunn, the curriculum has shifted over the past



*Learning for Justice Director
Jalaya Liles Dunn*

30 years “from reducing prejudice to more pointedly supporting action to address injustice.”²⁴ In other words, it’s not enough to oppose racism; one must become an activist. To counteract injustice and encourage togetherness, Dunn states, “together, we’re teaching the hard history of American slavery. We’re promoting policies that ensure queer students are safe on campus. We’re navigating critical conversations with young people about race, gender, class and more.”²⁵

The “critical conversations” Learning for Justice seeks to “navigate” with children have less to do with the acquisition of knowledge and much more to do with shaping a worldview in line with the SPLC’s progressive agenda, inculcating voting habits informed by identity politics, and advancing a “social justice” mission to protest and disrupt political structures. By inserting their radical notions into the American education system, they defy the rights of parents to direct their children’s education and determine what is best for them. To “counteract injustice and encourage togetherness,” LFJ relies on ideologies

that reject the notion of American exceptionalism and promote their subjective views and definitions of “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” along with all the administrative bureaucracy it requires.

The two most obvious and dangerous consequences of this kind of politics in our nation’s schools are sexually charged LGBTQ activism—especially gender identity ideology—and divisive and racist curricula and trainings based on Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Parents (Christian or otherwise) who believe a child cannot change from one sex to another will find themselves at odds with school administrators and counselors in school districts across the country. Many school



systems have policies that require schools to “protect the privacy of the student” even and especially when parents are perceived to have concerns about gender reassignment or identity.²⁶ Learning for Justice has many resources devoted to just this sort of “corrective education” for students and parents.

The most significant portion of Learning for Justice’s materials focuses on race, the problem of whiteness, white supremacy, systemic racism, and similar CRT-based concepts. Parents have addressed school boards across the country in opposition to divisive classroom lessons centered on racial identity politics. The source of those CRT-based materials can often be traced back to the SPLC and groups like it.

Learning for Justice started as a twice-yearly magazine called *Teaching Tolerance*. But it didn’t stop there. LFJ floods public school classrooms with:

- Lesson plan tool kits
- Social media resources
- Professional development webcasts and seminars
- Best practice guides on race, LGBTQ, digital citizenship
- Films and podcasts for professional or classroom use
- Supplemental materials aligned with Common Core Standards
- Excellence in Teaching Awards
- Grants for teachers and administrators for social justice activism

Classroom resources aren't the only way Learning for Justice is trying to reach children in grades K-12. LFJ has also started infiltrating teacher training schools in universities across the country.²⁷ For example, *Teaching Tolerance in Higher Education: Case Studies of Teacher Preparation Programs* highlights interviews with leaders in 13 institutions of higher learning who train the next generation of teachers to use the SPLC in their classrooms.²⁸

The SPLC's incursion into higher education provides a window into their ideological advocacy. In one example, SPLC materials are used by Danielle Centano, who runs Claremont Graduate University's (part of the Claremont College consortium) teacher induction program near Los Angeles, California. Centano offers:



“We don’t just prepare teachers. We prepare socially just teachers. That means our mission is aligned with Teaching Tolerance’s mission. I find that Teaching Tolerance is a place that I know is going to help provide timely and current social justice resources to our students [who are teachers].”²⁹

Not content with reaching teachers in established careers, Learning for Justice goes straight to the source: education departments at major teaching universities in strategic states. These efforts have real-world consequences. For example, parents and grandparents in Idaho regularly contact FRC with concerns about the leftist curriculum offerings at public schools in their state—courses and materials very out of step with their traditional community values.

According to the group’s Higher Education report, Boise State University’s teacher training program has been targeted to use SPLC resources to recruit the next generation of teachers in Idaho. From the report:

The school boasts a large teacher education program, and it places graduates into the increasingly diverse Boise-area schools. Sonia Galaviz is a longtime advocate for TT materials; she has also **served on the [TT’s] advisory board** [emphasis added]. In 2016, Galaviz structured an entire class around TT materials ... to teach unit design and other basic principles while also guiding her students into the more advanced arenas of multiculturalism and diversity. ... Courses like hers demonstrate the ways that TT materials can fit into pre-service classrooms that bridge content areas, bringing Teaching Tolerance to audiences who might not otherwise encounter it.³⁰

The problem in Idaho is so odious that Lt. Governor Janice McGeachin has established an Education Task Force on Indoctrination in Idaho Education.³¹ Although many corporations and nonprofits are now in the “diversity, equity, and inclusion” educational resource space, the SPLC has had a

longstanding effort to target Idaho children for messages around race and human sexuality.

WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

An example of how SPLC materials embarrass and abuse children in classrooms occurred near Raleigh, North Carolina. Wake County students at Heritage High School complained to parents



about a “Diversity Inventory” that was part of an English class assignment. Parents objected, alerting the school system that their children had been traumatized by having to physically stand in front of posters signifying their sexual or gender identity, among other aspects of the assignment. NC Values Coalition has done fantastic work standing with parents concerned about the lesson and uncovering the ideology behind it.³² The lesson has been pulled, but administrators failed to condemn its use or source.³³



The so-called “Social Justice Standards” from the SPLC were not devised or written by any educational authority at the state or federal level. Even at a local level, no school board committee drafted this document, debated it, and voted on the contents or deemed it appropriate for school use. Instead, SPLC executives crafted these highly political “anti-bias framework” standards to further their progressive partisan

agenda. The SPLC mails them directly to school administrators and actively encourages their use by offering teacher training³⁴ and other staff support to ensure widespread adoption. This leaves parents and taxpayers in the dark.

This kind of politicking in classrooms prompted North Carolina's Lt. Governor Mark Robinson to create an education task force called FACTS: Fairness and Accountability in the Classroom for Teachers and Students.³⁵ Their work is ongoing.³⁶

WACO, TEXAS

In the summer of 2019, several failing schools in Waco, Texas, offered a literacy program for students. The schools had been placed under special oversight of an organization called "Transformation Waco."³⁷ The summer literacy program was offered in June and July. It was free for students but paid for by the school system. The Freedom Schools³⁸ program is a project of the left of center Children's Defense Fund and was offered in partnership with Baylor University's Education Department. The Freedom Schools program uses Learning for Justice curricular supports and is promoted on the LFJ website.³⁹

Community activists, alerted by concerned parents, soon discovered that a controversial presentation on sexual and gender identity had taken place without parental notification or consent. In addition, the graphic film *Valentine Road: The Murder of Lawrence King* was shown to 11–13-year-olds. (The

Community activists, alerted by concerned parents, soon discovered that a controversial presentation on sexual and gender identity had taken place without parental notification or consent.

film depicts sexualized content, extreme bullying, and a student murdering another student.) Freedom School students would also participate in “social justice action” to reduce gun violence, which included children marching in an outdoor protest.⁴⁰

Many of the students in the program were English Language Learners whose parents probably placed them in the program to boost reading ability because their children were attending a school not meeting state standards. Would those parents have agreed with the sexual and social justice agenda included in an alleged “literacy program”? We will never know because the parents were not asked. Parent complaints resulted in Baylor removing a staff member associated with the program, but the damage was already done.⁴¹

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SCHOOLS

Even the nation’s military children are not spared from the racial and sexual propaganda of SPLC programs. According to the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) 2020 Fact Sheet:

[DODEA] is globally positioned, operating 160 accredited schools in 8 Districts located in 11 countries, 7 states, Guam and Puerto Rico. There are 996,069 military connected children of all ages worldwide, of which more than 69,000 are enrolled in DoDEA schools and served by approximately 8700 educators.⁴²

The DODEA website offers links to material from the SPLC, along with materials encouraging the celebration of Pride Month.⁴³

A recent 2021 Equity and Access Summit hosted on the DODEA website relied on SPLC resources and provided a very disturbing look into the attitudes and agenda of some of the staff responsible for educating the children of military personnel serving our nation overseas. In one exchange, during a seminar called “Ally 101: How to be an Ally for LGBTQ+ students,”

educators described the care that is taken to protect the identity of a transgender identifying student who is “out” at school but not at home.

According to Genevieve Chavez:⁴⁴

You can ask ‘May I use this name with other teachers, including substitutes?’...If they circle yes, you might want to chat with the student about because it might depend on the substitute. I know that our school in Rota, we are a very, very small community, and a lot of caregivers will substitute at the school. So, you know I have had a student who is not out at home in their gender identity but um their mom substitutes at our school and so you know just kind of navigating those waters. Communication is just the biggest thing.

These glimpses into the established practices of educational professionals reveal just how endangered children are by “gender-affirming” policies and procedures promoted by groups like the SPLC.⁴⁵ Parents are easily removed from conversations around gender affirmative interventions in school when they are not present in the building. But even when the parent is physically present and offering services as part of the educational team, he or she can still be deceived about their own child being “affirmed” or “socially transitioned” at school, a path that can easily lead to medical interventions. It’s not unusual for a child’s “need” for medical interventions to be the first time parents are informed of the steps the school has taken to provide “gender affirmative care” for a student—without the consent or knowledge of the parent.

It is chilling to think that the children of our nation’s military personnel would be subjected to anti-American propaganda at schools paid for by the U.S. Department of Defense. There are many examples of CRT programs at military academies.⁴⁶ The fact that this kind of material is also promoted to soldiers’ dependents is unacceptable.

THE SPLC'S ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

Learning for Justice and the Southern Poverty Law Center enjoy direct access to schools that flows from a longstanding working relationship with the National Education Association (NEA). The NEA has endorsed and even collaborated on developing the SPLC's teacher indoctrination programs.⁴⁷ NEA cites SPLC executives as experts.⁴⁸ The NEA has embraced the SPLC and empowered them to prioritize activism over academics in our public schools. The NEA even presented its 2016 NEA President's Award for Human and Civil Rights to (the now-fired) SPLC co-founder Morris Dees.⁴⁹ The powerful teacher's union, which has an iron grip on the nation's schools, flexes its muscle to foist LFJ on unsuspecting teachers and innocent students.

The National Education Association has embraced the SPLC and empowered them to prioritize activism over academics in our public schools.

In her book *Standing Up to Goliath*, former teacher and education advocate Rebecca Friedrich explains:

NEA's 2017 New Business Item (NBI) 30 states: "In partnership with the Southern Poverty Law Center, NAACP, ACLU, GLSEN [Gay Lesbian Straight Education Alliance], National Center for Trans-Equality, Human Rights Campaign, and any other legal and human rights groups of related concerns, NEA will track incidents of discrimination, racism, homophobia, and transphobia, as well as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and all other forms of religious discrimination, and bigotry in our public schools. The data will be shared with districts to educate and eradicate hate through the development of programs that include, but

are not limited to, training on unconscious bias, culturally responsive instruction, and the anti-defamation league.”

... The unions, as usual, are complicating matters because their real motives are not to combat the bullying of all students; instead, their motivations are to push their social and political agenda onto every single child, parent, and educator in every single school across America.⁵⁰

Friedrich also notes that education unions “initiate, condone, and promote bullying when the victims are teachers, parents, students, or Christians who dare to question the union agenda.”⁵¹ The group’s radical agenda was on full display at the 2021 NEA annual meeting and representative assembly. Several business items on the calendar focused on punishing conservative groups and promoting CRT and other left-leaning ideologies and groups. When media coverage exposed this bias, the NEA scrubbed its website of those biased entries.⁵²

SEXUALIZED CONTENT FOR CHILDREN:

A LEARNING FOR JUSTICE SPECIALTY

Parents are constantly battling to protect children from sexualized images and content aimed at them. Whether it’s television, movies, video games, social media, or music lyrics and videos, sexual themes and images abound. Most parents would prefer schools to focus on learning reading, writing, history, math, science, music, and the arts. Rather than offering a refuge from our culture’s sexualization of children, LFJ works to normalize it.⁵³

LFJ has many classroom resources on sexuality and gender. Sexual advocacy is a high priority for LFJ—most often without parental notification. Time and again in the LFJ materials, teachers and administrators are reminded NOT to share information with parents that would “out” a student’s sexuality or gender to their parents. SPLC executives have advised the use of Welcoming Schools,⁵⁴ a project of the Human Rights Campaign. This LGBTQ program⁵⁵ specializes in focusing on very young students, grades K-6.⁵⁶

If your local library or school library has an LGBTQ display of books for children, chances are a list from the Welcoming Schools website or the American Library Association⁵⁷ was used as a guide.

Learning for Justice's *Best Practices for Serving LGBTQ Students* is a school climate guide that has been mailed to approximately 14,000 school districts in the country. The guide includes information on how to have a "gender-inclusive" school dress code. According to LFJ "experts," words like "respectable,"



"revealing," "provocative," and "distracting" target identities instead of clothing; therefore, it is not a best practice to use these terms.⁵⁸ The advice provided by LFJ includes comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education, listing National Sexuality Education Standards (another very official-sounding but anti-family set of opinions about what children should know about sexual activity) as a resource;⁵⁹ explains how teachers and administrators can be allies of youth who identify as LGBTQ;⁶⁰ suggests integrating "Queer Voices" into the curriculum;⁶¹ provides DO's and DON'T's for managing a student who "comes out" to a teacher at school;⁶² and offers advice for managing objections from family members or anti-LGBTQ legal organizations.⁶³ LFJ's hostility toward religion and faith is exposed in its frequent reminders that a person's religion is not an excuse to bully people who identify as LGBTQ—thereby casting Christians as de facto bullies.

Learning for Justice's movie *Bullied: A Student, A School, and a Case that Made History* was released in 2010. There are multiple resources for its use on the LFJ website, including a 24-page viewing guide with a "school climate survey" and questionnaires for students and faculty. According to the SPLC's 2019 Annual Report, LFJ delivered 2,486 *Bullied* film kits to schools that year alone.⁶⁴

In just under a decade, schools have gone from screening a movie like *Bullied* in class in order to promote LGBTQ inclusion to now enforcing state mandates requiring LGBTQ content in many subjects across the curriculum. California and New Jersey schools will implement an LGBTQ history requirement in 2019. This new and controversial content is being met with parent protests.⁶⁵ Virginia is also rewriting policies related to sexual identity for primary and secondary schools in the state. Parents find themselves outside the process, while so-called sexual rights interest groups have a seat at the table.⁶⁶

What kind of LGBTQ content will parents find in curricula? Learning for Justice offers many suggestions. The Queer America Podcast, available on iTunes and the LFJ website, offers 13 episodes of classroom material. The first episode of "Queer America" offers very general advice for incorporating LGBTQ content in elementary school, middle school, and high school curricula. Later episodes address specific identities within the LGBTQ label and advise how teachers can incorporate this material into lessons, whether or not their school districts allow or approve such content.

Daniel Hurewitz is a guest on the first episode of the Queer America podcast and is a history professor at Hunter College in New York. He teaches history courses, and his pupils include master's level students getting teacher certifications. After spending a few minutes assuring the audience that queer history is not hard to teach if you just have the right attitude, he gets down to what he calls, "The nitty-gritty: Where are the places you can start incorporating LGBTQ content into your history

classes?” The first place he suggests is with teaching the Gold Rush, “which in my experience comes up in fourth grade and probably shows up in your curriculum in a variety of places. We almost assume about the Gold Rush, is the kind of loneliness of all those men in this, what we might call ‘bachelor society.’ How hard it must have been for them to be out there, away from all the women of American society and culture.” He then suggests finding historical etchings, paintings, and drawings from the 1800s that show men in the mines having a “great time together.” Hurewitz goes on to describe a great American painting by Charles Christian Nahl called *Sunday Morning in the Mines*. He describes the painting as a triptych, with various vignettes splashed about the painting that seem to celebrate men “happy to be in a community only with other men. ... They were happily having intimate lives just with other men.”⁶⁷



“Sunday Morning in the Mines”

Life in the mines was a major theme for Charles Nahl, known as the first significant artist of California. In fact, the bear on the California state flag is an image from his work. Nahl was born in Germany, studied art in the Kassel School, and immigrated with his family to the United States, moving to California for the gold rush.

The interpretation offered in the Queer America episode is problematic. When one looks at the painting described in the podcast, a very different interpretation becomes clear. The painting is not a triptych. It is, in fact, divided in half by the pine tree. “Sunday Morning in the Mines ... has become emblematic of the gold-rush era. An allegory painted in 1872, the scene is based on a letter-sheet illustration that the artist created in the early 1850s. The right side of the painting depicts the Sunday morning activities of virtuous miners, and the left depicts the irresponsible pursuits of the morally corrupt.”⁶⁸ This description is copied from the Crocker Museum website, California Supreme Court Justice EB Crocker having commissioned the painting. Not quite the triptych gay moment the SPLC would have us believe.



Nahl's 1854 parable "The Idle Miner and the Industrious Miner"

The theme is not at all about men being away from the civilized world and alone with each other, but rather a reflection on “virtue versus vice” or “industry versus idleness.” Nahl illustrated a published parable on this theme in 1854.

The parable recounts the tale of two lifelong friends, one of which is the idle miner who fails to work and wastes the gold dust shared with him by his hardworking friend on drinking and gambling. He dies sick and away from home. Meanwhile, the industrious miner rises early and works hard, invests his gold, continues to work, and is able to return home a hero to

his family: “He brings them home a winning smile – a form robust and strong – a soul unspotted by the crimes of those he fell among. He tells his friends, that wish to know the cause of his success, that those who seek the mines must work, AND DRINK AND GAMBLE LESS!”⁶⁹

In its *Queer America* podcast, the SPLC has promoted an interpretation of a historic work of art that is very far from its intended spirit and meaning. The SPLC and Learning for Justice have taken a theme that any parent would wish their child to learn—the reward of labor and the danger of idleness—and turned it into a lesson that demeans the American work ethic



and identity and marginalizes women. According to the podcast, the painting offers a chance “to put our ideas in a historical context that says, ‘Our ideas weren’t eternal, aren’t traditional, aren’t the way all Americans always thought and felt.’ But in fact, are different from the way they thought and acted 100 years ago.”⁷⁰ The Judeo-Christian values that informed the worldview of the artist and his patron are directly assaulted and replaced with an LGBTQ interpretation of this work. It is in this way that LfJ’s LGBTQ curricula subvert the teaching of actual history.

When prominent figures in American history are known to have identified themselves as LGBTQ, including them as such is only

accurate and fair. However, drawing inferences and conclusions based on a slanted worldview is not. This example from the first episode of *Queer America* is but one of many suggestions for LGBTQ content and themes. Their veracity and relevance are debatable at the very least, but the inclusions are suggested to teachers nonetheless.

OTHER LEARNING FOR JUSTICE ISSUES:

FACT VS. FICTION

Parents need to be aware of the many other issues that Learning for Justice and similar organizations seek to exploit for political gain in our nation's schools. A publication of this length cannot debunk each threat LFJ presents, but we can offer an overview of topics parents should monitor.

Parents need to be aware of the many other issues that Learning for Justice and similar organizations seek to exploit for political gain in our nation's schools.

The SPLC is well known for exaggerated claims and fearmongering regarding racial discrimination, LGBTQ bigotry, gun violence, and abuse of authority. This culture of alarmism and disregard for fact permeates LFJ.

Critical Race Theory informs much of the content promoted by the SPLC. Take, for example, this passage from *Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education*:

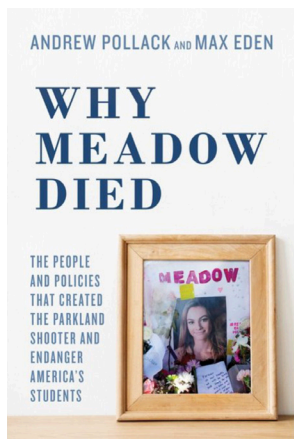
The questions teachers ask profoundly shape learning. Critical engagement requires open-ended inquiries for which there is no single “right” answer. Students should be asked to form and defend their opinions about the meaning of complex texts and social realities. Open-ended

questions are prompts like “Which of the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights do you think are most important and why?” as opposed to “Which five rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are focused on economic issues?” The second question only asks students to memorize and recall. While close and critical reading requires students to ask and answer text-dependent questions, it is important that those questions also promote discussion, stimulate student thinking and allow students to hypothesize, speculate and share ideas.⁷¹

This material is meant to be a professional development resource for K-12 educators. Are American school students so well versed in our founding documents that teachers must supplement their studies with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Is this a Common Core-aligned educational standard in the service of producing “global citizens”? Or is the SPLC so awash in the groupthink of CRT that LFJ resources must abandon the teaching of founding documents produced by slaveholders and resort to teaching UN material? This is just one example of CRT-infused teacher resources offered by the SPLC.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

The SPLC and Learning for Justice make much of the “School to Prison Pipeline” narrative, as do many other prominent organizations active in schools and our political system.⁷² The idea is that zero-tolerance policies in school discipline lead to racial disparities in expulsions of minority “special needs” students. The thinking goes that the higher rate of expulsions, in turn, causes more minority children to end up on a pathway to jail due to the failure of the school to teach them. But the facts just don’t bear this out, which is why the Department of Education rescinded the guidelines on zero tolerance policies in December 2018.⁷³ Roger Clegg, president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, applauded the move. According to Clegg, the policy’s primary victims were students “who want to learn but whose classrooms are disrupted and dangerous because schools are reluctant to discipline students who ought to be.”⁷⁴



In *Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies That Created the Parkland Shooter and Endanger America's Students*, Marjorie Stoneman Douglass High School (MSDHS) parent Andrew Pollack and his co-author Max Eden explain the role Broward County Schools played in the ultimate creation of the Obama-era guidance designed to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline policies.⁷⁵ The book describes how a well-intentioned policy failed to educate minority students while at

the same time endangering the entire student body at MSDHS. Every parent with school-age children should read this book.⁷⁶

This terrible discipline policy is now spreading across the country. Much like “gender identity” policy, it is complicating school discipline and classroom management across the nation.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the Biden administration is poised to enforce these race-based policies from their Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education.⁷⁸ Parents and teachers know that children cannot learn in a setting that is disruptive and dangerous. That is not to say that school discipline cannot be merciful, but the Parkland incident underscores the fact that irrational disciplinary leniency brings on another more serious set of problems.

SLAVERY, CIVIL RIGHTS, IMMIGRATION, VOTING RIGHTS, AND MORE

We deplore racism and wish to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Sadly, the divisive identity politics purveyed in Learning for Justice material does little to promote healing or dialogue.⁷⁹ The LFJ materials offer some helpful suggestions and some useful history. But the narrative that pervades the offerings too often leaves the impression that the problem is too large to solve and there is no hope for a better future.⁸⁰ This ignores

the great strides America has made toward racial equality and equality between the sexes. LFJ material often demoralizes the reader and creates a paradigm where change is a goal that will never be reached.

LFJ promoted Black Lives Matter resources and curricula as early as 2016.⁸¹ Black Lives Matter was founded in 2013 by three self-described Marxists.⁸² The radical and partisan nature of this group was evident in its rhetoric⁸³ and its mission statement (now deleted from their website), which included the following:

We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable. ... We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead. ... We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence. ... We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.⁸⁴

Even after the violent protests in the summer of 2020, LFJ continued to promote the highly partisan organization’s material and programming for schools,⁸⁵ including the Black Lives Matter Week of Action.⁸⁶

As you can see in the image below taken from training materials for teachers produced by LFJ⁸⁷, the young woman in the center of the photo is wearing an Assata’s Daughters (“AD”) shirt. On AD’s website, it states “AD was founded, planned, and operated by Black women, femmes, and gender non-conforming people to carry on the tradition of radical liberatory activism encompassed by Assata Shakur, to train up others in the radical political tradition of Black feminism, and to learn how to organize on the ground around the demand for Black liberation, particularly a

demand for abolition.”⁸⁸ Assata Shakur (AKA Joanne Deborah Chesimard) is currently on the FBI’s Most Wanted Terrorist List for the 1973 murder of a police officer at a traffic stop.⁸⁹ She was convicted in 1977 of first-degree murder, assault and battery of a police officer, assault with a dangerous weapon, assault with intent to kill, illegal possession of a weapon, and armed robbery. She escaped from prison in 1979 and is thought to be living in Cuba. The SPLC has no qualms about using this radical imagery in training materials for teachers.

The New York Times Magazine’s “1619 Project” is an interactive series of articles and poems examining American history after enslaved persons arrived in Jamestown Colony in 1619. The *Times* claims that 1619 is the true year of America’s founding, not 1776.⁹⁰ An op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* sounded the alarm: “Most dangerous of all, the Pulitzer Center has packaged



the Times project as a curriculum for students of all ages that will be disseminated throughout the country.”⁹¹ However, the “1619 Project” is just the latest version of offensive ideology and distortive historical revisionism to enter mainstream consciousness. The SPLC has been saying the same things unchecked to a much larger audience for decades.

Learning for Justice’s “Teaching Hard History” and its predecessors have occupied this educational space for years. It is an excellent example of how CRT fomented divisive and anti-American sentiment in classroom resources. For example, Essential Knowledge point 17 states:

Students will know that the United States was founded on protecting the economic interests of white, Christian men who owned property. In the process, it protected the institution of slavery.

17.A Twelve presidents, including the author of the Declaration of Independence, and the “Father of the Constitution,” enslaved people.

17.B Slavery was politically, socially and economically central to the founding of the United States of America.

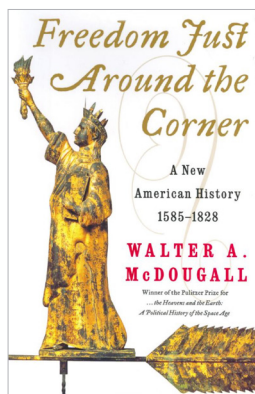
17.C The Constitution provided many protections for slavery.

17.D Many enslaved people were inspired by the idea of freedom and fought on both sides of the Revolutionary War. Some were forced to fight. Others chose to fight, hoping that they would be freed afterward.⁹²

THE SPLC MISUNDERSTANDS AMERICA – SYSTEMICALLY

It would take more space than is available here to fully dissect and dispel the distortions and errors laid out in these Teaching Hard History “essential knowledge” summary points.⁹³ Without question, students should learn a complete, accurate history of the United States that includes instruction about the evil institution of slavery. The amount of excellent scholarship being conducted today about slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction Era is impressive.⁹⁴

The highly regarded historian, Walter MacDougall, writes in the first paragraph of his multi-volume history of this nation that “[t]he creation of the United States of American is the central event of the past four hundred years.”⁹⁵ He observes that a group of time-travelers from the Renaissance looking at their world and ours would see the four corners of the earth largely the same – except for North America. Accurately, he writes:



The only continent that would astound the Renaissance time-travelers would be North America, which was primitive and nearly vacant as late as 1607, but which today hosts the mightiest, richest, most dynamic civilization in history—a civilization, moreover, that perturbs the trajectories of all other civilizations just by existing.⁹⁶

This civilization that has “perturbed” the world for centuries was not merely another society subjugated by monarchs or despots or obsessed with the preservation of slavery. Revisionist historians like the SPLC and LFJ diminish or ignore the amazing accomplishment that was the founding of the United States.

The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the various state constitutions, and the state bills of rights captivated the minds of observers around the world. Of particular significance, in France, the *philosophes*, reformers, and later, the revolutionaries were engrossed in American political developments and thinking. For example, from 1776 to 1783,



French booksellers published nine translations of the American Declaration of Independence and five translations of state constitutions and bills of rights.⁹⁷

What was so important about these backwoods political actors in America that a person in civilized France would pay attention to them at all? They did so because our Founding Fathers and the United States had, in less than two decades, achieved two great things previously unknown in world history.

First, they had established self-government by a substantial portion of the American *citizenry*. They had overthrown a distant monarchy and its thuggish, aristocratic oligarchy. In 1770, in no place in the world was there a democratic nation that could reject one leadership group and replace it with another via popular election. America changed that in the mid-1770s and 1780s as 13 state governments and one national government established democratically chosen representative governments.

When Abraham Lincoln closed the Gettysburg Address⁹⁸ by stating that those honored dead buried at that battlefield cemetery had fought so that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” he meant something non-theoretical. While dealing with the horrors of our civil war, American men and women alive in late November 1863 were keenly aware of the events at Lexington and Concord. The survival of representative government was not taken for granted.

Second, many of these colonial legislative bodies issued general pronouncements of universal human rights that shocked the world. The Virginia Declaration of Rights⁹⁹ (June 1776), in greater detail and with numerous provisions, and the Declaration of Independence,¹⁰⁰ more succinctly, made it clear that human beings possessed inalienable rights derived from God made evident to them through Reason.

The United States did not become *the* catalyst for political change in the modern world because it “was founded on protecting the economic interests of white, Christian men who owned property” and “protected the institution of slavery in the process.” Or, as the SPLC later states, “Slavery was politically, socially, and economically central to the founding of the [U.S.].” This is a narrow and bigoted assessment of American history.

Slavery was not “central” to the founding of the United States. Puritans did not sail the Atlantic in the 1630s dreaming of slave ownership. They dreamed of religious freedom, and they obtained it here on these shores. Furthermore, slavery was not “central” to

the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, or the national Constitution ratified in 1789.¹⁰¹ Slavery was not at the core of the thing—the United States. If it were, why would Congress declare in July 1787 (and again in August 1789) that there would be no slavery in the territories and emerging states arising from the lands north and west of the Ohio River? ¹⁰² It is a sad fact that slave states were later admitted to the union even after the Northwest Ordinance. Nevertheless, the law placed a marker indicating that slavery was a condition worthy of rejection and elimination from these pristine territories. These hardly seem like steps that a deeply committed slave society would have taken. Tragically, our later history saw a retreat from that moral clarity as the Southern states zealously embraced slavery both economically and intellectually—a position that ultimately led to Secession and the Civil War.

MacDougall's clarion reminder of America's revolutionary nature clarifies this historical debate. While revisionist history often teaches us to better understand important details in our past that we previously misunderstood or dishonestly buried, *e.g.*, the horrors and scope of slavery, revisionism often misses the main point of its subject matter. This is especially true of the post-modern, neo-Marxist spin-offs like the Critical Race Theory-based curricula being pushed by the SPLC and the 1619 Project. Learning for Justice is less teaching than propagandizing. The essence of America is a government founded on the idea, set forth repeatedly in the Bible, that all men and women stand equal before God Almighty, our Providential Ruler who made the universe.¹⁰³ That Creator bestowed rights including life, liberty, property ownership, and the pursuit of happiness upon us all. Although rulers and governments have not always appropriately recognized these rights, they are not dependent on the whims of kings, queens, or other oligarchic government structures. Governments were created to protect those God-given rights, not to dribble them out grudgingly to the people.

The American founding set human minds ablaze by creating democratically based republican governments and expounding

universal human rights. Thirteen years later, in August 1789, French political leaders meeting in Paris crafted their Bill of Rights and took great inspiration from the achievements of these Americans.¹⁰⁴ While these revolutions ran very different courses, one cannot deny that Enlightenment France looked to the United States' founding for guidance in these uncharted waters. The earth-shaking nature of America's founding was no myth.

Despite these two great achievements, American society contained a monstrous historical failing that would take almost 90 years to correct through the abolition of slavery. It was that *central* understanding about the nature of God, government, and human equality that propelled the nation forward with the moral force, courage, and perseverance to see emancipation through to its bloody conclusion. This effort produced between 650,000 to 850,000 deaths directly attributable to the war during its four



years of untold suffering and destruction.¹⁰⁵ But make no mistake about it—the conviction that freedom would be made national was intentional, determined, and consistent with America's founding principles.¹⁰⁶

Contrary to the implicit charge in the title, we do not object to teaching “hard history.” Rather, we demand the teaching of hard, accurate history. It should be history that captures the essence of the United States and its unique place in world history—both the bad and the superlative. It must be a history that understands that it was the logic of the Virginia Bill of Rights, the

Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution that made continued acceptance of slavery and the horrifyingly unequal treatment of millions of Americans anathema. Unfortunately, the SPLC's version of history is too much filled with hatred for this country to have the capacity to understand what is "central" to America and what is not.

The SPLC's version of history and those like it must be rejected root and branch and never allowed to pollute the minds of our children.

It is evident from the Teaching Hard History podcast that students' emotional reactions to difficult material and concepts like slavery are something Learning for Justice teachers consider. In the transcript of episode 14 of season two of the Teaching Hard History podcast, recorded during the pandemic, a Fairfax County teacher offers this:

And I would say, regardless of the approach that the individual educator chooses, I feel like it's important to emphasize backwards social emotional planning. What do we want students to be feeling by the end of this? ... And so, you know, of course, as educators, we neither want students to feel complacent or good about this history of injustice, of course, but we don't want to leave them despairing either. So where do we want them to be? And I think, you know, imagining one possible goal as empowering students as potential and current agents of social change, empowering them as actors in their communities and in their world, is a good starting point for thinking about where we want students to be by the end of their learning about the history of enslavement.¹⁰⁷

Rather than radicalizing students and fomenting discord, another possible goal would be to honor the progress we have made as a nation as the greatest best hope for freedom in the world, and to instill in students a love for America and our constant striving to be a "more perfect union."

THE EDUCATION INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX VS. PARENTS AND CHILDREN

“Local control” of public schools is a hallmark of the American educational system. American school systems are designed with community involvement and public accountability held as paramount. Elected school boards should ensure the representation of all views in the making of school policies. Our two-party system of government should mean that the natural tension and debate between different ideas and educational philosophies resolves into an agreement on goals that benefit all students and the community as a whole. The use of public funding should require transparency in how tax dollars are spent for educational purposes. Good governance practices should mean parents have easy access to curricula and test scores while being respected as the primary educators of our children.

That’s how things should work, in theory. We know the reality is much different and that one side tends to influence education more than another. But ideally, public school would require and allow for public accountability.

Enter the nonprofit educational industrial complex, dominated by national left-wing and progressive organizations, which seek to influence our education system. Infiltrating educational systems on the local level means access to both minds and money. Education nonprofits want to shape the thinking of the next generation and direct the schools’ resources to that end. There are hundreds of such groups—all with a progressive agenda to shape the worldview of the next generation of adults while they are still children. Groups with enough funding to offer schools “free” resources enjoy the advantage of means and can fly under the radar of public accountability. But their influence is profound. Groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Education Association, the Human Rights Campaign, and the Southern Poverty Law Center seek to influence or control the material and messaging aimed at America’s students today.

It is vital that Christian families and all people of faith pay attention to what is happening at school. Unfortunately, the “climate” or “caring culture” created in schools today by “social justice” promoters amounts to a hostile learning environment,



especially for people of faith and for families with traditional values. This hostility is most clearly evident in the increasing sexualization of students and the subject matter taught to them. But the failure to truly partner with parents, poor governance practices in many school systems, and lack of transparency are also essentially an assault on parental rights to know what their children are taught and to direct their upbringing. Christian parents have the same rights as any other parent in school. We have every right to be in public schools and every right to expect that our views will be respected. We know that with God, anything is possible, especially in this wonderful nation in which we are blessed to live.

An old saying comes to mind: pray like it all depends on God but work like it all depends on us. We must all pray for our nation, our leaders, and our most precious gift—our children. As you engage with your school on this or any other issue of concern, we suggest the following tips and resources to aid you in this mission.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Stay calm. When our children are confronted with morally objectionable content or treated in a demeaning way, parents are rightly angered. Quick action is necessary, but a calm countenance will help command the respect of those you wish to influence.

Be brave. We know parents worry that their children will suffer if a parent objects to something at school. We entrust our children to their care, and we know the power schools have. Speak out anyway.

If possible, approach officials as a group. This doesn't have to be a formal organization. Just knowing that more than "a couple of parents" are not happy is a sign to administrators that many more could also object.

Be complimentary. When you meet with school officials, be complimentary of things worthy of praise before bringing up concerns. There are many good people working in schools who are doing the best they can to serve their students. There are also Christian teachers who feel alone in what amounts to a hostile work environment for them.

Be willing to collaborate. In the absence of an alternative viewpoint, teachers and administrators use what is available. Your objection may be the first time a different point of view is expressed or is shared in a way that can be heard. Sharing your views should be a collaboration, if possible, rather than a confrontation.

Be persistent. Advancing your cause may take a longer time than expected. You may need to approach people many times in many ways. Sustain your efforts even when it seems futile. Persist in prayer as well.

Be creative. Remember that sometimes activist education officials are trained to handle your objections to this material. Come up with creative ways to communicate that your objections are valid and will not be satisfied until a solution is found.



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Meg combines her expertise in education policy with her skills as a coalition builder to promote excellence and accountability in America's public schools. She spearheaded dynamic change in her community by organizing parent groups to lobby school board members on important issues. Her leadership on these issues inspired the Virginia Family Foundation to name Meg as their Citizen of the Year in 2019.

Meg is married with four children and is an active member of her parish. A graduate of Washington & Lee University, she enjoys time with family, hiking, fly fishing, and reading.

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There is a rising trend of divisive identity politics—often marketed as “social justice education”—being taught to America’s school children. One of the organizations most responsible for this trend is the highly partisan and left-wing Southern Poverty Law Center and its Learning for Justice initiative. For the SPLC, the objective is not teaching “justice for all” but indoctrinating our nation’s children with disputed ideologies such as Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory. Due in part to the funding and efforts of the SPLC, these theories are increasingly being presented as fact in school curricula, professional development trainings for teachers, and even policies at the school board level.

Parents, teachers, school administrators, and concerned citizens will find the information in this resource useful as they work to safeguard our nation’s schools and children and get partisan politics out of the classroom.



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