

It Happens Here_Ep14_Backlash

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SPEAKERS

John Morrin, Leah Lemm, Christina Woods, Staci Drouillard, Prof. Anton Treuer

- S** Staci Drouillard 00:04
It Happens Here--exploring the roots of racial inequity on the North Shore. Episode 14--Backlash.
- J** John Morrin 00:12
American history slash white. That's American history in the United States. It's history for white folks. And that's how it's been taught. Since the educational system was created and curriculum has been created.
- L** Leah Lemm 00:28
Boozhoo Hello, I'm Leah Lemm, citizen of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and independent producer and host of the Native Lights podcast.
- S** Staci Drouillard 00:37
And I'm Staci Drouillard, Grand Portage Ojibwe descendant, and WTIP producer. It Happens Here is an ongoing series that highlights the history and experiences of people of color on the North Shore. We just heard from John Morrin, a Grand Portage band member and diversity trainer for the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. In this episode, we take a look at who, historically makes decisions about public school curriculum.
- L** Leah Lemm 01:08
As of May 2023, 18 states have passed laws that regulate classroom discussion about racism, sexism and systemic racism. And 44 states have introduced bills that if passed, would make it

sexism, and systemic racism. And 44 states have introduced bills that if passed, would make it legal to remove books, authors, literary and history curriculum that is viewed as controversial by those who create education policy. Here's Bois Forte citizen and diversity trainer, CHRISTINA WOODS.

C Christina Woods 01:39

So there has been a long time practice of gatekeeping as to whose history actually gets included. And there's a lot of power in that. That story lives in our public education system. Whose history do we tell? It lives inside of our museums, and our art institutions. Who's history are we telling? It lives inside of the laws and the policies that get made at the legislative level, at our city level, the history that we choose to tell is the history that we know. And then anything else falls away and becomes an absent narrative.

S Staci Drouillard 02:31

The assertion that our public institutions are built on a partial telling of history is at the core of a 40 year old academic theory called Critical Race Theory. Efforts to tell a more inclusive history is something that John Morin knows and understands very well.

J John Morrin 02:51

If we're challenging the way curriculum is taught, people of color are saying, "hey, teach everybody's history."

L Leah Lemm 03:00

Seeing history in a more inclusive way, is also something that Anton Treuer, Bemidji State University professor and author strongly believes in.

P Prof. Anton Treuer 03:11

It's critically important, you know? As a matter of an analogy, could you imagine going to see the shrink and the shrink says, "Do not tell me about your mother, don't tell me about anything that's ever happened to you before, you're only going forward from here." And it probably wouldn't be really effective. If we are to make a brighter, better future, we have to understand where we are. And to understand where we are, we have to know where we've been.

L Leah Lemm 03:45

In fact, the state of Minnesota recently passed legislation that is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, called the "Indigenous Education for All" Act. This three year initiative provides resources for the creation of tribally centered and urban curricular resource development and pilot programs for professional development.

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Staci Drouillard 04:09

So if learning the complete history of a place is ultimately a good thing, and worth supporting here in Minnesota, why do others see it differently? John Morrin has experienced this difference of opinion in his early work as an organizer with Cook County High School in Grand Marais and working with the state of Minnesota, on developing inclusive school curriculum.

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John Morrin 04:35

Native representatives have been involved in creating a social studies curriculum in particular, getting a lot of information and a lot of facts about the people who were in this area first, which is not really being taught in most public high schools. Here in Minnesota, we have Indian education programs that I think supplement the various history programs. Before I go in to the school--oh, I still do--In fact, I was just over there the other day in the Indian History course that we have at Cook County [High School] now. And we're one of the only public school districts in Minnesota that have a stand-alone Indian history course that kids get credit for. That's been ongoing for a number of years. And it's on the state level--American Indian people put in what they want to see in the history courses in the state educational school system. Now, I think were mentioned like 55 times which is a moderate improvement from not being mentioned at all. We understand when you try and change that system, the way it's been operating, and you take action against that system, there's a reaction. And so the reaction was we got a letter from 10 representatives who questioned our request and there was a push back. And the question was, "well, how come?" Then how come we don't talk about Norwegian or German--white history? That is the curriculum--American history is: American history/white. That's American history in the United States. It's a history for white folks. And that's how it's been taught. Since the educational system was created and curriculum has been created.

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Leah Lemm 06:29

John attributes, the lingering mainstream resistance for change, to a lack of understanding about our cultural differences,

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John Morrin 06:37

American Indian people are still practicing a culture. So our African American people, Asian people, Hispanic slash Latino people, they're still living a culture that is different than what is called "American culture" or "white culture." And so how people are socialized and conditioned in what is called "white culture." They're socialized and conditioned to think of themselves as individuals. E pluribus unum "out of many, one," well, that's not just a nice phrase, but it's to get everybody to think the same way. And so they think, as an individual, "I'm sorry, the Black folks are getting shot or Native people are getting shot, acknowledging that Asian people are getting abused and hurt. But that doesn't affect me," versus the culture of people of color. See, we think in a collective way, we don't think as individuals unless we've been totally assimilated from our culture and that's possible, but we think as a collective. So when we try to transform that system, to educate all of us, not only our kids, but other kids, about American Indian people and the contributions that they played in the development of the country, you will get

that backlash--and that you'll get that backlash. And that's that white superiority, thinking that "why should we change?" It doesn't make them bad people, just that they don't understand how they've been conditioned. What I'm saying is racism just confuses us. Keeps us confused. So that when we're confused and not clear, and don't have respect for each other's cultures, and different ways of life, then we get socialized and conditioned to bully and to fall back on stereotypes. And misinformation.

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Staci Drouillard 08:43

Supporting the full history of America, in our public schools and other institutions just may be one antidote to the confusion caused by racism. Here's Professor Treuer,

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Prof. Anton Treuer 08:58

We have to learn from the mistakes of history so we don't repeat them. If we want to reconcile, we have to tell these stories and sometimes many times, so that we can not only get a better understanding, but get a shared understanding of what that history is and what it means. There are many reasons why understanding history and exploring it are really important, but it has the power and the potential to unite us.

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Staci Drouillard 09:28

For WTIP, this is Staci Drouillard

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Leah Lemm 09:32

And I'm Leah Lemm. Miigwech for tuning in.

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Staci Drouillard 09:35

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