



*Educating Ohio's Citizens for Tomorrow's World*

# Ohio

## Council for the Social Studies

Position Statement: Importance of Social Studies in Confronting Anti-Black Racism

*Approved by the Board on June 3rd, 2020*

I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

—Elie Wiesel, Acceptance Speech on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1986

The expressed purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. This charge demands that social studies educators cultivate civic habits and dispositions that acknowledge the various identities that children, youth, and adolescents possess, but that also cherish and utilize identities to build community, engender compassion, and uphold tolerance.

A full embrace of race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, socio-economic status, religion, indigenous status, language, immigrant-status, and nationality in the social studies classroom *supports* the full duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy. Anti-democratic discourses of discrimination, marginalization, and bigotry act as barriers to any democracy.

**Therefore, the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS) urges social studies professionals to urgently stand against anti-Black racism, and racism in all its forms, and engage in pedagogical acts that model inclusivity, justice, and equity.**

Because our classrooms are incubators for democracy, human dignity must be a hallmark of our work, as well as a commitment towards the common good. Together, we as social studies educators must uphold our responsibility to educate for democracy and work tirelessly to promote human dignity.

**A Call for Anti-racist Education & Black Lives Matter**

OCSS calls on social studies teachers and researchers to acknowledge, study, and work to end racism; most urgently, against Black Americans. Racism damages not only individuals and families but society and its institutions, including schools. The continuing police murders of Black people, and the refusal of the court system to punish police for these crimes, has fueled an explosion of protests — from the streets to the schools. Most recently, after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020, 40 U.S. cities imposed curfews and National Guard members were activated in at least 23 states and Washington, DC. In 2019, Washington D.C. had a Black population of 50%, yet, 88 percent of all police killings were against Black Americans (Mapping Police Violence, 2020).

Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping or discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization. Anti-Black racism is deeply embedded in U.S. institutions, policies and practices, to the point that it becomes a part of our systems, whether in high poverty or affluent communities.

We hereby declare our support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which identifies and challenges discriminatory and oppressive practices in institutions that should serve and protect the rights and interests of all citizens. We refuse to remain silent, as social studies teachers are expected to model the very values, dispositions, and skills we advocate.

The structure of opportunity and experience of Black Americans has been shaped by historical and contemporary inequality and injustice. Young people of color in high poverty communities have radically different experiences with civic institutions and their agents (schools, law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and teachers) than do their more affluent peers in predominantly white communities. All students should have equitable opportunities to learn social studies in high-quality schools; yet, race and ethnicity are significant predictors of inequities in access to social studies curriculum and instruction.

Social studies classrooms are places where young people have the opportunity to make sense of the world, including issues that affect their lives on a daily basis. Experiences of injustice and inequality become salient and transformational within the social studies classrooms when students learn about the history and civic values and commitments of Ohio and the United States. Social studies educators have a key role to play in questioning institutional access and fostering a critical understanding of issues of race and inequality, including the role of Whiteness and privilege.

In order to live-up to its mission, OCSS and its affiliated groups must be leaders in state and national conversations regarding anti-racist education. An acknowledgment by social studies educators of the persistence of inequality, racism and racial prejudice and its profoundly negative impact on children, society, and our democracy will clarify the contribution to be made by the social studies in supporting racial justice and human rights.

OCSS hereby commits itself to the development of social studies education and research that addresses these concerns. Further, it affirms its support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement and other initiatives that draw attention to and fight for an end to institutionalized racism, social injustice, and racial prejudice.

Note: This Position Statement has been adapted and updated, with permission, from the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies' *Position Statement on Racial Injustice and #BlackLivesMatter* passed November 3rd, 2016. Retrieved at <https://cufa.socialstudies.org/resourcesmain/new-item>