

# Florida still teaches 'benefits' of slavery

## Educators say criticisms of standards ignored

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For another year, Florida public school students will continue to learn that Black Americans in some way benefited from slavery.

On Wednesday, the Florida Board of Education approved the state's 2024 social studies standards, which include an African American history curriculum that has caused frustration among the state's Black communities, who say some of the lessons "alter history" and are "inaccurate."

One of those inaccuracies, they say, is a benchmark clarification: "Instruction includes how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit."

"I'm just baffled because I provided the Department of Education with language that would be less inflammatory and less inaccurate than that statement. It is unbelievable," state Sen. Geraldine Thompson, D-Orlando, told the USA TODAY Florida-Network.

"What I suggested to them was apparently totally ignored," she said.

A request for comment is pending with a Department of Education spokesperson.

While the agenda item for Wednesday's meeting was to update the standards with curriculum for 9/11 Heroes' Day and the history of Asian American and Pacific Islanders, it comprised the entire social studies catalog, including African American history.

"These new and revised standards will directly impact student achievement in Florida and will make sure that our teachers have the right standards to engage in high quality instruction," said Paul Burns, chancellor for the Division of K-12 Public Schools.

For almost a year, Black communities across Florida, led by elected officials and religious leaders, have pet-

itioned and chastised the Florida Department of Education, state Education Commissioner Manny Diaz, Gov. Ron DeSantis and the State Board of Education, chaired by Tallahassee attorney Ben Gibson, for allowing the curriculum to include wording that critics say victim-blames Black communities and rewrites history.

Also still included in the 2024 African American history curriculum is a benchmark clarification for high schoolers learning about the Rosewood and Ocoee massacres: "Instruction includes acts of violence perpetrated against and by African Americans."



**Thompson**

The Ocoee Massacre is considered the largest incident of voting-day violence in U.S. history, according to the Orange County Regional History Center. In 1920, Mose Norman, a Black man, tried to vote but was turned away from the polls. Later that night, a white mob tried to find Norman and his friend. That friend, July Perry, was lynched and other Black community members were murdered and their houses burned. Most of the Black community subsequently fled Ocoee and never came back.

Thompson, who worked on legislation that requires the state to teach about the Ocoee Massacre, questioned why Black people who were trying to defend themselves against a mob are considered violent.

Wednesday's re-approval of the curriculum is another item in a list of grievances Black legislators and Floridians have had with DeSantis and the state's education department.

In 2023, the state rejected the College Board's Advanced Placement African American Studies class because it was "inexplicably contrary to Florida law and significantly lacks educational value," and in 2022, DeSantis signed the Stop WOKE Act, which restricts how colleges and workplaces talk about race, gender and sexuality.