

Does the Witch Hunt to Rename Monuments Signal a Narrow Education?

In case you haven't noticed, there's been a popular trend to rename various [geographical](#) and [manmade](#) landmarks. The renaming attempts often revolve around issues of racism, particularly in relation to whether an individual was pro-slavery.

The latest incident in this line of renaming attempts occurred at a high school in Madison, Wisconsin. As local publication *The Capital Times* [explains](#), the school is named for America's fourth president and one of the nation's founding fathers, James Madison. And therein lies the trouble; for Madison, like many of the nation's founders, owned slaves.

This fact brought a great deal of consternation to Mya Berry, a student of the school who happens to be of African American descent. Berry began a petition to change the school name, "citing the need to create a more inclusive environment for African-American students."

Cases like these are hardly unique today. What's interesting about this incident, however, is the process through which it came about. According to *The Capital Times*:

"Berry said she was inspired to start the petition after watching a documentary about the history of enslavement. Currently, she is enrolled in a social justice class where her teacher asked students to consider the type of change they want to make in the world.

'This is my social change,' she said."

Let's start by giving credit where it's due: it's exemplary

that schools like the one Berry attends are trying to teach their students to make a difference in the world. But in aiming for this goal, have schools failed to give their students the tools to actually do so in a sensible, rational way?

Take, for example, the instruction which inspired Berry to petition for a name change for the school. One of these points of instruction was a course on social justice. As has been [noted in the past](#), social justice curriculum is becoming prominent in schools and often conditions students “to see the world through the lens of race, to adopt the mantras of certain radical groups, and to become activists.” Such a viewpoint is clearly one-sided and seems to provide indoctrination rather than instruction in reaching an informed decision.

The second factor which influenced Berry’s advocacy was a documentary on slavery. Such a topic is a worthy one; however, it is only a small, specialized area of history. According to the [Nation’s Report Card](#), only 12 percent of American high school students are proficient in this subject. Clearly, America’s schools are not very effective at passing on a broad, well-balanced view of our nation’s past.

This is important, particularly considering that Madison himself wrestled with the idea of slavery. As a [collection of quotes](#) from George Mason University indicates, Madison, like many other founders, saw major problems with the practice and spent a decent amount of time pondering and debating various ways to abolish it. By focusing on specialized, selective glimpses of history, are students receiving a one-sided, inaccurate overview of the past, and actually being encouraged to condemn and forget those who made significant contributions to the anti-slavery argument?

If we want students who will make a positive difference in society, perhaps it’s time we stopped schooling them in such

narrow, specialized subject matter.

Image Credit: George G. Milford bit.ly/1p2b8Ke