

Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Wants Historical Education, Not Critical Race Theory

As the former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was sworn into office, she stood beneath Benjamin Franklin, her favorite founding father.

“I remember thinking, ‘I wonder what old Ben would think about this Black woman being sworn in to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America, being sworn in by a Jewish woman Supreme Court Justice named Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was my, my neighbor at the Watergate,’” she said. “Of course, he would never have imagined it.”

Now, as legislation sweeps across the country, restricting discussion of race in schools, Rice said education must preserve history, while not racializing children.

“I don't mind if critical race theory is debated in the Stanford Law School, by all means, have at it,” she said. “But do I really want eight year old Joey to have to carry the burden of what his ancestors did to the ancestors of eight-year-old Bobby? No.”

Legislation in states like Texas, Tennessee and Florida bans dialogue on privilege, oppression and the notion that the U.S. is inherently racist. A federal judge in August 2022 blocked Florida from enforcing the “Stop W.O.K.E” Act, calling the policies “bordering on unintelligible.”

Shantel Buggs, an assistant professor at Florida State University in the sociology department and African American History studies, said she solely teaches critical race theory to graduate students.

“(Critical race theory) is being turned into this boogeyman monster taught to kindergarteners, when that’s not really what it is,” Buggs said.

Instead, teachers may integrate intersectionality into their assignments and lectures that are age appropriate, she said.

Rice grew up entrenched in Birmingham, AL segregation. She recalls being barred from movie theaters, and a Santa Claus holding Black children at arm’s length. In fourth grade, she read “Know Alabama.” The textbook features images of smiling slaves beside their masters.

“The first thing any good master thought about was the care of his slaves,” the book says.

The book is the other extreme, another one to avoid, Rice said.

“We need to have a truthful accounting of what America's history is,” she said. “We need to stop trying to erase elements of our history.”

Both of Rice’s parents held teacher roles: her mother as a science and english instructor and her dad as a presbyterian minister and coach.

“My parents used to say, ‘you have to be twice as good,’” she said. “And they meant being Black, you have to be twice as good. So from my point of view, I was going to have to be twice as good at men, I work twice as hard. And that meant I was twice as confident.”

Although being Black is a core of her identity, Rice said she doesn’t want her race to be the sum of her or for children in schools.

“We've spent 150 years trying to make sure that race wasn't the only thing that matters,” she said. “I don't really want to go back.”