

Republican education and dissent

By Mike Gonzalez

A great debate in America has been joined, and it's the states that are waging this battle of ideas. Governors in Florida, Virginia, and Arkansas are turning back efforts to present America as a systemically rotten, oppressive place that needs root-and-branch transformation. About time.

The woke Left—somehow surprised that anyone would fight back—is down-right apoplectic. Good. President Biden, for his part, waxes poetic about great government programs, as if this were the 1930s all over again, with his administration's policies giving the woke Left all it wants.

All the more reason to, once again, thank our lucky stars that we have a federal system with 50 laboratories of democracy. New York, for example, may demand that to graduate from the State University of New York (SUNY) system students take a course in racial equity. But the states where New Yorkers are actually flocking to in the hundreds of thousands every year are free to seek a return to normalcy.

Thus, in Florida we continue to see Gov. Ron DeSantis in a marquee tussle with the College Board over its Advanced Placement African American Studies (APAAS). The governor won a real victory there when he told [the board](#) that, no, it couldn't distribute APASS because it taught black history through a Marxist lens that views America as an oppressive state which must undergo systemic change.

The board—a nonprofit that, in addition to producing the AP courses that are studied in high schools across the nation, also administers tests used by colleges in the admissions process—backed down. Gone from the curriculum were the thoughts of such Marxists as Keeanga-Yamahta Taylor, Robin D.G. Kelley, bell hooks, and the downright communist Angela Davis.

Stanley Kurtz, whose chronicling of DeSantis's efforts on the pages of National Review has been stellar, wrote Thursday that,

DeSantis's tenacity in the face of the huge uproar from the left over his already considerable APAAS victory is plenty consequential. By continuing to expose the College Board's distortions, along with its interventions in what are by right state and local curricular decisions, DeSantis is shaking America's education establishment to its foundations.

DeSantis also won an apology from Miami black leaders after one of them called the governor a “racist” over the fight with the College Board. Pierre Rutledge, the chairman of the Miami-Dade Black Affairs Advisory Board, issued a statement after a member of the board exclaimed this week that “Our governor is racist.”

“Words matter,” [said](#) Rutledge. “And so as chair, I must start by saying we want to pull that back. There’s nothing wrong with saying ‘we’re sorry.’ That’s not what we intended to say or be depicted by anyone.”

Not satisfied with all this, DeSantis has also [appointed](#) a new Board of Trustees for the New College of Florida, in a bid to turn the Sarasota-based institution away from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and toward a classical education. He also has [announced plans](#) to block state colleges from having CRT programs.

DeSantis has the great fortune of having a majority of his own Republican Party controlling the Florida Senate in Tallahassee, which will confirm the new board.

In Richmond, Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin faces a four-seat Democrat majority in the Senate, which this week on a party-line vote removed one of his appointments to the State Board of Education, Suparna Dutta.

The reason, perplexingly, is that Dutta, an immigrant from India, defended traditional American values and rejected the notion that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution enshrined slavery in America.

Last week, Dutta had engaged in a debate with another board member, Anne Holton, who spoke against Youngkin’s new learning standards, which refer to America’s founding documents as “remarkable.”

[Declared](#) Holton: “To an audience as inclusive as our Virginia is, you cannot reference the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as ‘remarkable documents’ without also acknowledging that they [are] fundamental in enshrining slavery, and limiting the protections that they provided only to white property [owning] men.”

And that is where the battle is joined. Holton— a liberal who is married to U.S. Senator Tim Kaine—has bought into the socialist fads that has suddenly occupied the leftist brain.

Whether America is oppressive or not, and whether policy should attempt to remedy such oppression, is an important debate that must ultimately be resolved politically, just as Youngkin’s election in 2021 was. The state Senate is up for re-election this November.

Those on the pro-American side of the debate could ask how it's possible that so many immigrants like Dutta constantly flock to our shores. The Left, of course, is free to make the Marcusian argument that America's material abundance blinds people to their own servitude, and therefore our schools should teach children that their country is evil. May the best argument win.

In giving [her rebuttal](#) to President Biden's Tuesday night State of the Union speech, which was laden with government programs, Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders cut to the chase and devoted most of her speech to this big debate we are having.

"Most Americans simply want to live their lives in freedom and peace, but we are under attack in a left-wing culture war we didn't start and never wanted to fight," said Sanders, then leaving no doubt that she intends to fight back.

"The choice," the young governor said, "is between normal and crazy."