

Texas moves to whitewash history of slavery and racism



One state bill seeks to block the Alamo complex in San Antonio from explaining that major figures in the Texas Revolution were slave traders. (Photo: AP)

San Antonio, May 21 (RHC)-- In a bid to whitewash the dark history of slavery and anti-Mexican discrimination, the U.S. state of Texas has moved to reframe history lessons in schools. New measures proposed by lawmakers in the state, which could take the shape of law, are seen as an attempt to

manipulate the Republican-held state's history and control the teaching of history textbooks in American schools.

It comes as nearly a dozen other Republican states have pushed similar measures to ban or reframe how the history of racism and discrimination is taught in schools. The northwestern state of Idaho was the first U.S. state to turn such measures into a law, seeking to withhold funding to schools that teach lessons deemed as harmful to the state's cosmopolitan character.

It was followed by Louisiana, New Hampshire and Tennessee, where lawmakers have recently introduced bills that would criminalize teaching about the long legacies of slavery and segregationist laws, pointing to racism and sexism in these states.

“The idea that history is a project that’s decided in the political arena is a recipe for disaster,” Raul Ramos, a historian at the University of Houston, was quoted as saying by The New York Times. Texas, seen as a bastion of right-wing Republicans, has long sought to imbibe similar measures with radical leanings. The GOP-controlled legislature has also advanced other hard-line measures such as newly introduced voting restrictions.

The measures to alter history and manipulate the truth, however, have raised concerns among educators, historians and activists, sparking protests and complaints about ignoring the role of slavery and anti-Mexican violence in the state.

One such measure that was recently endorsed by the Texas House, seeks to limit teacher-led discussions of current events, prohibit course credit for political activism, and ban teaching of The 1619 Project about Black Americans. The bill also seeks to ban how teachers in Texas schools can discuss ways in which racism influenced legal system in the state, and rest of the country.

Another bill that made it to the Texas House envisages a committee to “promote patriotic education” about the state’s secession from Mexico in 1836, while a third bill pushes to block the exhibition of figures at San Antonio’s Alamo complex that expose the crimes of slave owners. “How do you have freedom when you have slavery?” Ramos asked. “Eighteen thirty-six values would have enslaved African-Americans in perpetuity.”

The proposed legislation has stirred the debate over whether glossing over the state’s most painful chapter in history does bring pride for its people.

It has also sparked ideological battles over a range of issues including the January 6 attack by right-wing Republicans on the U.S. Capitol, with Texas Republicans voting down a proposal that would have required schools to teach about the insurrection, to the immigration status of the white American enslavers who settled illegally in what was then northern Mexico.

“Do you want our Texas kids to be taught that the system of government in the U.S. and Texas is nothing but a cover-up for white supremacy?” Steve Toth, a Republican legislator from Houston, said while introducing the bill banning lessons about racism in the country.

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