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ENGL 104  
Talk of the Town

### **All's Not Well in Brew City: An Avoidance of Race in MPS Texts**

Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun hit the nail on the head as far as social education goes when he said “in order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way.”

There it is. The hot button issue many would prefer not to talk about: race. But it's the issue's avoidance which has caused the seemingly taboo topic to become all the rage with local Milwaukeeans this season. Over the past 4 months, the Milwaukee Public School system and its review board have examined, adopted and, in some cases, reconsidered their selection of a new, controversial Social Studies textbook series. Many believe the books paint an inaccurate portrait of our nation's history and, as such, are an ineffective tool in teaching social education. Adopted for grades kindergarten through eight, the Houghton Mifflin series has prompted outcries from locals demanding our nation's whole history be taught in the public school system. The words *racism*, *anti-semitism*, and *stereotype* are never mentioned in the fifth grade edition while numerous other editions fail to include pictures of black families, or even single-parent households.

Milwaukee public school teacher, Joyce Goulet, claims the books to be “a sterling example of institutional racism and old-fashioned closed mindedness.” Certainly, by failing to teach our children about the tremendous role that racism, discrimination, etc. have played in forming the face of our country we, as a society, are doing them and ourselves a tremendous disservice. This reasoning then begs the question about what the appropriate age level is to be introducing these issues. My proposal? The same age-level sexual education is introduced. If

children are old enough to learn about love, they are certainly old enough to learn about hate. But these issues must be introduced with the same level of care, too. What might be interesting, though, would be to hear Justice Blackmun's take on the subject-- given he authored the majority opinion in the 1973 case of *Roe v. Wade* and may have a thing or two to say on the subject of human rights. But, I digress. What would be more appropriate, however, would be to include those people who know Milwaukee area children the best: their parents.

Victor L. Goode of the NAACP believes that with any sensitive issue, there must be a certain level of "meaningful parental involvement and community education" when trying to calm any created rifts. Even further, Goode challenges educators to seek a higher degree of parental involvement in their child's educational experience and not be content with a limited "concept of parental involvement, one that focuses on baking cookies rather than on engaging, and sometimes challenging the educational power structures that make the real decisions about public education." Goode's view is the one I tend to agree with most, actually. He contends this issue could have been avoided, or at least mediated earlier, had parents been actively involved in the selection process. These kinds of preventative measures are necessary if our society ever plans to properly educate its youth on the social plagues of our nation and eventually resolve these issues.

There it is: *racism*. Shouldn't have to live with it; but one certainly can't live without knowing about it.