

O P I N I O N

Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address, and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is 10 a.m. Monday.

Agree with every word

To the Editor:
 Passing through Sisters on June 23, I read Jim Cornelius' editorial in the then-current *Nugget* ("A wrecking ball," page 2).

I think it is the first time in my long life that I have agreed with every sentence in an opinion article. Some of the comments prompted my enthusiastic "Yes!"

Heather Kerr

Sisters *HOT* Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday June 30 • Mostly Sunny 99/61 	Thursday July 1 • Sunny 96/59 	Friday July 2 • Mostly Sunny 96/61 	Saturday July 3 • Mostly Sunny 95/62
Sunday July 4 • Mostly Sunny 94/59 	Monday July 5 • Mostly Sunny 92/57 	Tuesday July 6 • Mostly Sunny 89/54 	

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Website: www.nuggetnews.com
 442 E. Main Ave., P.O. Box 698, Sisters, OR 97759
 Tel: 541-549-9941 | Email: editor@nuggetnews.com



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Self-evident truths

By Jim Cornelius
 Editor in Chief

The Sisters School District is on the right track in focusing on creating a sense of belonging for ALL of its students — and stepping around culture war Claymore mines and booby-trapped tripwires such as Critical Race Theory.

As outgoing school board chair Jay Wilkins noted in a recent op-ed in *The Nugget*, "Creating a sense of belonging — if done improperly — can feel like a zero-sum game and create backlash or resistance. If done properly, it lifts every member of our community and makes us all stronger."

Critical Race Theory (CRT) isn't an educational curriculum — although it can influence education — and it's not "diversity and equity training." As defined by the American Bar Association:

"CRT is ... a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society that emerged in the legal academy and spread to other fields of scholarship... It critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers... (I)t acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation."

While CRT may technically be a legal analytical framework — and a useful one at that — it has come to be used as shorthand for a range of race-based pedagogical approaches, some of which are truly bizarre: Treating math as a tool of white supremacy, for instance. The "backlash or resistance" to some CRT-derived propositions is well-founded. Parents are right to push back against programs that would inculcate shame and self-loathing in white students, or advance a paradigm in which children enact roles as a "privileged" class or an "oppressed" class in a fixed system. Parents are right to fear that such teaching will harm their children and further divide people one from another.

It should be self-evident that this kind of indoctrination — for that is what it is — is psychologically damaging. That such manifestly outlandish, divisive, and harmful notions have gained any traction in the mainstream is evidence of how far our culture has strayed into a hall of distorted carnival mirrors.

Despite all this, we must seek to honestly address our history. From the very beginning, the greatness of the nation and our ideals have

been shadowed by unlaidd ghosts of conquest, dispossession, and chattel slavery. There is no better means to engage with the complexities of American history than through examining the life and legacy of Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of the document we celebrate this Fourth of July.

Jefferson penned America's civil creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Yet Jefferson was a slaveholder, who believed that Blacks were inferior to whites. It has been established to near-certainty that he had a sexual relationship with his slave Sally Hemings and fathered as many as six children with her. Hemings was the half-sister of Jefferson's deceased wife, Martha. Jefferson took a teenaged Hemings to Paris with him in the 1780s, when he served as an ambassador to France. Technically a free woman in Paris, young Sally reportedly refused to return to America with Jefferson until he granted her "extraordinary privileges" and agreed to free her children at the age of 21.

Jefferson struggled all his life to reconcile his libertarian ideals and his personal entanglement with slavery. As the Thomas Jefferson Foundation notes:

"Throughout his entire life, Thomas Jefferson was publicly a consistent opponent of slavery. Calling it a 'moral depravity' and a 'hideous blot,' he believed that slavery presented the greatest threat to the survival of the new American nation. Jefferson also thought that slavery was contrary to the laws of nature, which decreed that everyone had a right to personal liberty. These views were radical in a world where unfree labor was the norm."

And yet... he enslaved some 600 people over his lifetime.

We can learn much about ourselves from studying Jefferson. Like the man who did so much to launch our Republic, we are brilliant, complicated, imbued with noble ideals — and flawed and fallible. We need not be shamed by him, but we must learn something from his — and our — story.

Jefferson feared that white Americans and Black Americans would always be two "separate nations" who could never live together peacefully in the country he helped to found.

Can we come together, at long last, to prove him wrong?