

# TEACH TRUTH STUDY GUIDE

## Reading *Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education* and Taking Action

Jesse Hagopian

### About the Book

*Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education* by Jesse Hagopian examines the urgent fight for honest education in the face of widespread efforts to suppress critical discussions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and history. Woven throughout *Teach Truth* is the story and testimony of James Whitfield, a Texas principal who lost his job for addressing systemic racism—along with other interviews with educators, students, and parents—revealing the personal costs of truth telling in education. However, *Teach Truth* also celebrates the collective acts of school communities that are fighting against what Hagopian calls “truthcrime” laws and the beautiful struggle being organized in pursuit of educational justice. Offering a critical analysis of systems that perpetuate racial injustice, Hagopian calls for building social movements that transform education into a tool for liberation.

### How to Use This Study Guide: A Letter from the Author

Dear advocate for educational justice,

This study guide is designed to help you reflect on the ideas and content of *Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education* and spark ideas for how to apply its concepts to communities, classrooms, and social movements. A study group that meets monthly to discuss each chapter is a powerful way not only to engage with the material but also to grow the size and intellectual strength of the Teach Truth movement. If you have a large study group and want to inquire about getting a

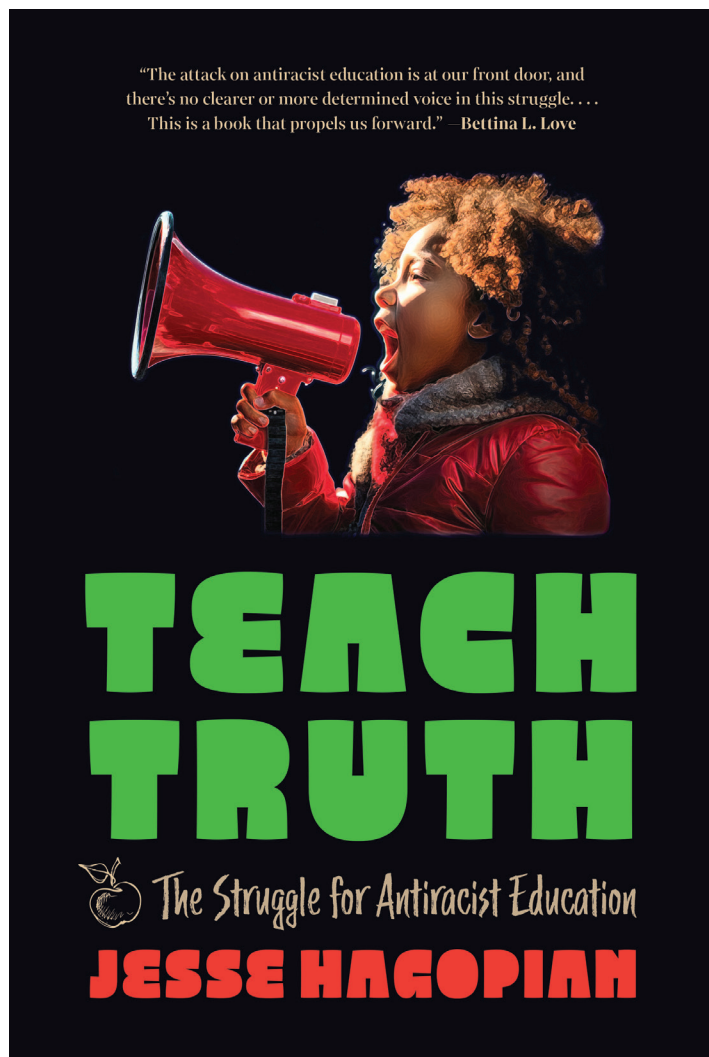
discounted price for a bulk order of *Teach Truth*, please send an inquiry to Haymarket Books at [info@haymarketbooks.org](mailto:info@haymarketbooks.org).

This study guide includes questions about the ideas and historical analysis in each chapter of the book, as well as the perspectives of the students, educators, parents, and organizers in the Teach Truth movement. I hope many of the ideas in this book will be exciting to discuss—concepts such as the beloved classroom community, uncritical race theory, and the radical healing of organized remembering, to name a few. Ultimately, however, this book is not meant to only spark lively discussion but rather to be a guide to action. The point is to put the ideas into practice. This can be done by educators transforming their lessons, by parents advocating for antiracist curriculum at school board meetings, by students organizing rallies against laws that deprive them of an honest education, and by organizers helping to mobilize communities for educational justice. Each section of this study guide concludes with one or more action items that provide practical steps for collective mobilization in the fight for honest education.

By coming together in community, we can take ideas from the page to build a movement that makes a lasting impact. Happy reading and good luck in the struggle.

Solidarity,

Jesse Hagopian



## Preface: A Promise to My Ancestors

Hagopian reflects on visiting the land in Mississippi where his ancestors were enslaved, making a promise to continue the fight for justice and truth.

### Key Questions

1. What does the discovery of the Lenoir Plantation and the pilgrimage to Mississippi reveal about the significance of ancestral connections in shaping identity and purpose?
2. How does Hagopian define truth teaching? How do concepts such as standpoint theory, curriculum standpoint, and strong objectivity help us access honest history and better understand how knowledge is produced, validated, and contested?

### Action Items

1. Write a letter to your ancestors reflecting on your commitment to justice.
2. Begin a critical family history project: Explore your ancestors' roles in systems of power or resistance. See [Christine Sleeter's Genealogy & Anti-Racism](#) and [SURJ Bay Area's Critical Family Histories](#).

## Introduction: Truthcrime and Uncritical Race Theory versus the Beloved Classroom Community

Hagopian introduces concepts “truthcrime” and “uncritical race theory” as forces attacking honest education. He contrasts these with the vision of a “beloved classroom community” built on truth, love, and justice.

### Key Questions

1. How does Hagopian define “uncritical race theory,” and how does it contrast with critical race theory?
2. How does Jesse Hagopian define truth? How do concepts like standpoint theory, curriculum standpoint, and strong objectivity help us access honest history and understand how knowledge is produced?
3. What does the concept of a “beloved classroom community” mean, and how can love and truth transform classrooms into spaces of healing and resistance?
4. What strategies can educators, students, and communities use to resist truthcrime laws and promote truthful education?

### Action Items

1. Start or join a *Teach Truth* study group.
2. Begin a journal to reflect on the ideas in *Teach Truth* and how they connect to your own experiences.

## Chapter 1: Educational Arson, Epistemicide, and Organized Forgetting

This chapter explores how the deliberate erasure of histories—through educational arson, epistemicide, and organized forgetting—maintains racial injustice.

### Key Questions

1. How does the concept of the “violence of organized forgetting” help us understand the marginalization of Black history in the curriculum?
2. How has epistemicide been used historically and today to perpetuate colonization and suppress marginalized voices?
3. What is the gentrification of history and how can we challenge it in our schools and communities?

### Action Item

1. Conduct a history audit: Identify figures, events, or movements that have been erased in your textbooks or in your city and create a plan to restore these stories to your school or community.

## Chapter 2: “We’re Going to Hunt You Down” The Attack on Students, Educators, and Books

This chapter exposes the attacks on students, educators, and books, revealing how truthcrime laws enforce censorship, erase histories, and threaten academic freedom.

### Key Questions

1. How does the indifference of the school administration in Traverse City to students holding a mock slave auction reflect broader trends in handling racist incidents in schools?
2. What tactics are being used to silence educators who teach about race, gender, and identity?
3. How do attacks on educators who teach the truth about racism and oppression illustrate the broader political and social agendas surrounding race and inequality?
4. What are the potential long-term impacts of truthcrime laws on higher education and academic freedom? What happens to a society that doesn’t allow honest conversations among college students about its flawed history?
5. What are the limitations of the DEI framework for addressing systemic racism and injustice as described in the book? What other frameworks can you identify that would be useful in dismantling systemic oppression?
6. How does the historical persecution of LGBTQ+ educators during the Lavender Scare relate to the current efforts to censor LGBTQ+ topics in education today? What similarities do you see between the tactics used then and those used now?
7. How does the repression of education about Palestine connect with the attack on critical race theory and LGBTQ+ students and the legislating of truthcrime?

8. What role does standardized curricula, including pacing guides and high-stakes testing, play in limiting teachers' ability to engage students in discussions about race and social justice? How do these factors combine with truth-crime laws to suppress critical conversations?
9. Think of a book that had a big impact on you. What if that book were banned and you had never read it? How would that have impacted you?

#### Action Items

1. Organize a #ReadBannedBooks event in your school or community.
2. Start a study group around Palestine and teaching about Palestine. There are many books and resources that can serve as an anchor text, including the Rethinking Schools' book *Teaching Palestine*, or the book, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*, and the website [TeachPalestine.org](http://TeachPalestine.org). From there you can work to get a resolution passed in your union to support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction of Israel and work to ensure that a university in your area is not invested in Israel.

### Chapter 3: The Political Economy of Truthcrime

This chapter uncovers the billionaire-backed, politically motivated attacks on antiracist education, tracing connections between truthcrime laws, school privatization, and the defunding of public education.

#### Key Questions

1. Who funds the attacks on CRT, and what are their broader political goals?
2. How does the language of "school choice" echo segregationist policies; why is it significant in the truthcrime movement?
3. How do attacks on antiracist education connect to efforts to privatize public schools?
4. Compare the Republican Party and the Democratic Party's education policy and approach to antiracist education. What similarities and differences do you see.

#### Action Items

1. Investigate school board candidates' ties to anti-CRT groups and create a community report.
2. Organize a local campaign to expose dark money influences on education policy.
3. Support a candidate for school board that opposes truth-crime laws—or organize a campaign to run yourself.

### Chapter 4: "We Will Teach This Truth!"

#### The Teach Truth Movement

This chapter highlights grassroots resistance: students, educators, and parents fighting back through protests, legal challenges, and collective action to defend honest education.

#### Key Questions

1. How have students like Ana Villavasso and others organized against truthcrime laws?
2. What role do educators and librarians play in resisting censorship and promoting truthful education?
3. What strategies from the Teach Truth movement can inspire and inform your local work?

#### Action Items

1. Join or organize a local Teach Truth event for the National Teach Truth Day of Action, held every year during the first weekend in June. Possible events include organizing a historical walking tour, banned book swap, rally, teach-in, public reading, or film showing.
2. Take the Zinn Education Project's public [pledge to teach truth](#) and share your commitment on social media.

### Chapter 5: The Radical Healing of Organized Remembering

Hagopian calls for reclaiming suppressed histories as a path to healing and liberation, framing education as a space for collective memory, community, and resistance.

#### Key Questions

1. What is the "radical healing of organized remembering," and how can it counter the violence of organized forgetting?
2. How can educators create "beloved classroom communities" that integrate social and emotional learning with historical truth-telling?
3. How does engaging with ancestral stories and community memory contribute to healing and resistance?

#### Action Items

1. Host a storytelling event or reading group focused on family histories and social movements.
2. Join a movement for truth-telling in education, such as [Black Lives Matter at School](#) or [HEAL \(Honest Education Action & Leadership\) Together](#)—a movement of students, parents, educators who believe that an honest, equitable, and fully funded public education is the foundation for a just, multiracial democracy.

## Conclusion: Turning the Fountain of Knowledge on Educational Arson

The book ends with a call to collective action: resist educational arson, defend honest education, and build a movement for liberated learning.

### Key Questions

1. How does Hagopian connect war, systemic racism, and education in his analysis of injustice?
2. Why is collective action essential in the fight for educational justice?
3. What's your vision for a liberated education system, and how can you help make it a reality?

### Action Items

1. Register at the [Zinn Education Project](#) website and get free, downloadable antiracist lesson to teach in your classroom or community. This includes the “[Teach Truth Syllabus](#).”
2. Subscribe to [Rethinking Schools](#) to learn about all the most recent struggles for educational justice.
3. Create and share your vision for a liberated education system.
4. Get active in your union. You can form a union caucus to advocate against truthcrime laws or help elect leaders who will fight for antiracist education.
5. Sign up for a [HEAL Together Training](#) to meet others in your area who are interested in defending antiracist education.
6. Organize a study group, teach-in, or campaign to demand honest education in your community.

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## Further Resources

### Books

*Black Lives Matter at School* edited by Denisha Jones and Jesse Hagopian

A collection of essays, interviews, and reflections on the Black Lives Matter at School movement, offering insight into the struggle for racial justice in education.

*Teaching for Black Lives* edited by Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian, & Wayne Au

This book highlights how educators can center Black lives in the classroom by promoting antiracist practices and teaching.

*Rethinking Ethnic Studies* edited by R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, Miguel Zavala, Christine Sleeter, & Wayne Au

A guide for educators on how to implement Ethnic Studies curricula that reflect diverse histories and cultures.

*Our History Has Always Been Contraband: In Defense of Black Studies* edited by Colin Kaepernick

This book is a critical defense of Black Studies, examining its historical significance and ongoing importance in the fight for racial justice.

*Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal* by Bettina Love

A powerful exploration of how education reform policies have harmed Black children, with a vision for healing and justice.

*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by bell hooks

A classic text that argues for education as a path to liberation, focusing on how teachers and students can transform the classroom into a space for freedom and critical thought.

*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

A groundbreaking work that examines the mass incarceration of Black Americans and its parallels to racial segregation.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire

A foundational text in critical pedagogy, exploring the relationship between education, oppression, and liberation.

*How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* edited by Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor

A collection of interviews and essays about the Combahee River Collective, discussing its legacy and contributions to Black feminism and intersectionality.

### Articles/Essays/Curriculum

#### **Teach Truth Syllabus**

The Teach Truth Syllabus, from the Zinn Education Project, offers an overview of curriculum to help educators teach honest US history.

#### **Erasing the Black Freedom Struggle: How State Standards Fail to Teach the Truth About Reconstruction**

This report represents a comprehensive effort by the Zinn Education Project to understand Reconstruction's place in state social studies standards across the United States, examine the nature and extent of the barriers to teaching

effective Reconstruction history, and make focused recommendations for improvement.

#### **History Is A Human Right**

From Stone Mountain to the Stonewall Inn, the #TeachTruth National Day of Action fights back against anti-history legislation.

#### **GOP Lawmakers Are Trying to Prevent Students From Learning About Reconstruction**

Guardians of the status quo have long sought to hide Reconstruction's unprecedented advancements for Black people.



## **How One Elementary School Sparked A Citywide Movement to Make Black Students' Lives Matters**

At John Muir Elementary, the school staff and community stood strong against white supremacist hate, and across Seattle Schools, teachers and parents found a way to stand in solidarity with Black students and their families. In the

process, the public dialogue about institutionalized racism in Seattle Schools was pushed forward in concrete ways.

## **Tracking the Attack on Critical Race Theory**

A Report from CRT Forward's Tracking Project, An Initiative of the Critical Race Studies Program

## **Websites**

### **Zinn Education Project**

Provides resources for teaching people's history, with a focus on highlighting marginalized voices.

### **Rethinking Schools**

A platform that offers articles, lesson plans, and resources promoting social justice in education.

### **Teaching for Change**

A resource for educators focused on equity and justice in schools.

### **Freedom To Learn**

The Freedom to Learn Network, convened by the African

American Policy Forum, is a coalition of the leading civil rights, human rights, and social justice organizations, united against the widespread attempts to limit antiracist education in US schools and undermine democracy.

### **Voices of a People's History**

A project that shares radical perspectives from marginalized people throughout US history.

### **Black Lives Matter at School**

Dedicated to promoting racial justice in education, this site offers resources for educators and activists alike.

## **Multimedia**

### **People's Historians Podcast** (Zinn Education Project)

A podcast, based on the Teach The Black Freedom Struggle online course from the Zinn Education Project, that offers lessons on key moments in Black history and their ongoing significance in the struggle for justice today.

### **Too Dope Teachers and a Mic**

A podcast that focuses on education, race, and social justice, offering insightful conversations about the experiences of teachers of color and the importance of culturally responsive teaching.

### **All of the Above Podcast**

A show that tackles issues in education with a social

justice lens, focusing on pedagogy, equity, and educational reform.

### **The Neutral Ground**

A documentary that follows New Orleans' fight over Confederate monuments and examines America's troubled relationship with the Lost Cause. Directed by CJ Hunt, the film captures the New Orleans City Council's vote to remove four Confederate statues in 2015.

### **Busted Pencils Podcast**

A podcast dedicated to progressive education issues, featuring conversations with teachers, activists, and thought leaders about the fight for public education and social justice.

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## **Glossary**

This glossary provides definitions for key terms and concepts developed in *Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education*. These terms help explain the challenges faced by educators, students, and communities as they confront efforts to suppress honest education about Black history, LGBTQ+ issues, social movements, and more. By understanding and using these terms, we can better grasp the importance of preserving truth in education and the power of collective efforts to resist the forces of censorship and historical erasure.

### **Beloved classroom community**

An extension of Martin Luther King Jr.'s concept of the beloved community, the beloved classroom community is an educational environment in which love, truth, and justice are at the heart of the learning experience. In this space, educators and students collaborate to build a nurturing atmosphere that supports social and emotional well-being, open dialogue, and pursuit of social justice. Drawing from bell hooks's ideas on love

in the classroom, this community fosters critical thinking and respectful conflict resolution without diminishing anyone's spirit. It emphasizes that love in the classroom creates a foundation for learning that moves away from domination and opens both minds and hearts. Additionally, the beloved classroom community encourages spaces where students can embrace creativity and joy, whether through singing, dancing, organizing, or other forms of expression.

### **Educational arson**

A term used to describe the deliberate destruction—with bombs, incendiaries, and flame—of educational resources, books, schools, and programs that advocate for antiracist history and critical thinking. Educational arson refers to the literal attacks on antiracist schools, books, educators, and students that have occurred throughout history. Educational arsonists are extremist *uncritical race theorists* who often use terrorism—such as burning or bombing schools—to suppress antiracist education.

### **Educational closeting**

The suppression of LGBTQ+ education, including “Don’t Say Gay” laws, the introduction of anti-trans rights measures in schools, the banning of trans athletes from participation in school sports, and the erasure of LGBTQ+ history and identity.

### **Gentrification of history**

The process by which the stories and experiences of wealthy white people are prioritized and centered in textbooks and lesson plans, while the histories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are ignored or diminished. Similar to the physical gentrification of urban spaces, historical gentrification expunges the struggles and contributions of marginalized communities and replaces their stories with narratives that cater to the interests of the dominant group. When BIPOC histories are redlined out of the curriculum, it perpetuates a message of their inferiority without ever needing to explicitly affirm white supremacy. This sanitized version of history upholds the status quo, erasing the complexities of racial struggles and downplaying movements that challenge injustice. The gentrification of history is a key tactic in the broader effort to suppress antiracist education and maintain systemic inequalities.

### **Honest educators/truth teachers**

People committed to teaching difficult truths about racism, history, and social injustice—even in the face of opposition and censorship. These teachers center their pedagogy on empowering students to think critically and to challenge systems of oppression. Truth teachers and honest educators resist efforts to sanitize or distort history, ensuring that students receive a full and accurate understanding of social justice issues.

### **Violence of organized forgetting**

A term developed by Henry Giroux, the violence of organized forgetting is the deliberate erasure or distortion of historical truths, often committed by those in power, to maintain existing systems of oppression. This process serves to keep the public ignorant of the realities of systemic injustice and to hinder the formation of social movements.

### **Parent Truthcrime Associations (PTCAs)**

Parent groups that advocate for banning the teaching of structural racism and gender issues in schools. PTCAs, such as Moms for Liberty (MFL), Parents Defending Education (PDE), and No Left Turn in Education (NLTE), are predominantly white and are heavily funded by wealthy elites, despite appearing as grassroots movements. PTCAs share similarities with the White Citizens’ Councils that opposed desegregation following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and often use dark money and sophisticated PR strategies to push their agendas. These groups are part of a broader effort to suppress honest education and maintain the status quo.

### **Radical healing of organized remembering (RHOR)**

A process that emphasizes the importance of collective efforts to recover and preserve suppressed or erased historical truths. RHOR posits that healing from trauma, both individual and societal, can only begin by acknowledging historical harm and dismantling the systems that perpetuate harm. RHOR focuses on education, social movements, and community engagement to facilitate this healing.

### **Truthcrime laws/truthcriminal**

Truthcrime laws ban or restrict teaching about systemic racism and critical discussions of race and oppression in schools. These laws are designed to suppress honest education by silencing educators who address the historical and ongoing impacts of racism in the United States. Truthcriminals are educators who are criminalized or persecuted for teaching the truth about history and systemic oppression in a society that seeks to suppress such education.

### **Uncritical race theory**

Systems of belief that unquestioningly subscribe to prevailing views on race, thereby reinforcing existing racial power relations. This theory denies the existence of racism altogether, claims that racism primarily victimizes white people, and rejects systemic and institutional analyses in favor of an interpersonal explanation, viewing racism as sporadic and solely the result of individual bias. Uncritical race theorists position themselves as neutral and objective and free from ideology or a theory of race—despite having a highly developed theory of race, even if they are unaware of its origins or full implications.