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Who's Afraid of Roberto Clemente?¹

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Base runners trying to go from first to third or score from second on a single to right field had good reason to fear Roberto Clemente's rifle arm. Pitchers had good reason to fear his powerful bat whenever Roberto was at the plate. Even a half-century after Roberto died on a mission of mercy, Ron DeSantis and his minions fear him, although their reasons are self-serving and wicked.

They fear that Florida's schoolchildren might be inspired by the life of this exceptional athlete and humanitarian, a man who literally gave his life to help others. They fear that children might be shocked to learn about the racism to which he was subjected throughout his Hall of Fame career.

That's why *Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates* has been banned from public schools in Duval County. Children in Duval County will never learn that Clemente helped organize relief efforts following a major earthquake in Nicaragua in 1972. And they'll never learn that one of the greatest right fielders in baseball history died at the age of 38 when a plane bringing supplies to earthquake victims crashed on takeoff on a rainy New Year's Eve in 1972.

Democracy depends upon an educated citizenry, one that is informed and able to think critically, one that, you might say, is "woke." Ron DeSantis, like all autocrats, fears an educated citizenry. That's why the Nazis burned books and why DeSantis bans them. They need an uneducated populace, one that can be led by the nose because it is ignorant of basic historical fact, one that is asleep, one that, you might say, is composed of Zombies.

The best place to begin erasing history and replacing it with the despot's false narrative is the public school system. DeSantis has made great strides toward the creation of a profoundly ignorant populace. George Orwell would be impressed by the names he gives to the legislation he has created to enforce ignorance.

His "education directive" requires American history "be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence." That eliminates whole swaths of American history from the curriculum.

His "Act Relating to Individual Freedom," which he bumptiously calls the "Stop Woke Act," bans any classroom instruction that would cause "guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress for actions, in which he or she played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex."

But DeSantis is not really interested in protecting schoolchildren, nor are Florida's schoolchildren the snowflakes he claims they are. If Ruby Bridges could suffer the trauma of needing to be escorted by federal marshals (see p. 6) to attend an all-White school nearly a century *after* the

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Emancipation Proclamation, surely Florida's schoolchildren can deal with the discomfort of learning about it.

No, brainwashing is the real reason DeSantis is banning the teaching of Black history (which after all is an integral part of American history). Many of the teachers who were paid to attend a workshop conducted under the aegis of his "Civics Excellence Initiative" [complained](#) that trainers sought to indoctrinate them in Christian and conservative ideology and to whitewash the history of slavery in America.

DeSantis is not protecting children. He is protecting himself and the Republican Party from voters who have been schooled in facts and educated to think critically. He is afraid that opening schoolchildren's eyes to past racism will open their eyes to the racism that still permeates this country.

But enforced ignorance is actually harming these children. Racism is a disease that is not easily cured, and pretending it doesn't exist ensures its survival. That may work well for DeSantis today, but not for these children and their children when they come of age and are the ones in the minority.