



From Persecution to Prosperity

Statement before the New Hampshire State Board of Education

Ian Rowe

Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
Senior Visiting Fellow, Woodson Center
Founder and CEO, Vertex Partnership Academies

March 11, 2021

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author.

To the distinguished members of the New Hampshire State Board of Education:

Good afternoon. My name is Ian Rowe.

I am a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where I focus on education and upward mobility, family formation and adoption. I come to you today with two hats on.

First I am a member of 1776 Unites, a black-led, nonpartisan, and intellectually diverse alliance of writers, thinkers, and activists crafting solutions to our country's greatest challenges in education, family, culture, and upward mobility. It was launched in February 2020 by civil rights movement veteran Robert Woodson and a number of black leaders who acknowledge America's history of racial discrimination, yet recognize the pathways taken by millions of black people past and present who are not bound by a defeatist ideology. The scholars and activists leading 1776 Unites are determined to spark a movement to liberate tens of millions of Americans to become agents of their own uplift and transformation by embracing the true founding values of our country.

The second hat I come with is as an educator. I myself am a proud product of the New York City public school system kindergarten through 12th grade, and a graduate of Brooklyn Tech High School, Cornell University College of Engineering and Harvard Business School. I am the founder and CEO of Vertex Partnership Academies, a new network of character-based, International Baccalaureate high schools, with the first campus to open in the Bronx in 2022. For the past 10 years, I was CEO of a non-profit network of public charter elementary and middle schools in the heart of the South Bronx and the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Our faculty had the solemn responsibility to educate more than 2,000 students—primarily low-income, black and Hispanic kids—whose parents chose our schools because they wanted their children to develop the skills and habits to become agents of their own uplift. We had nearly 5,000 families on our waiting list, all desperate for their kids to receive a high quality education.

Similar to parents throughout New Hampshire, many of our families in low-income communities may have faced racial discrimination and other challenges in their own lives and fear that their children might as well. But they knew that a great education can make a huge difference. They knew their children might face closed doors because of America's legacy of slavery. But they also knew that, because of America's legacy of black excellence and resilience in the face of slavery and discrimination, hundreds of doors are now open. And young people of all races have the ability to open their own doors if they are prepared to capitalize on the opportunities at their fingertips.

This is very important right now as we as a country and in New Hampshire are having critical conversations about race and racial disparities. I know you are considering a bill that defines and prohibits the dissemination of certain divisive concepts related to sex and race in state contracts, grants, and training programs.

Increasingly, American institutions — colleges and universities, businesses, government, the media and even our children's schools — are enforcing a cynical and intolerant orthodoxy. This orthodoxy requires us to view each other based on immutable characteristics like skin color, gender and sexual orientation. It pits us against one another, and diminishes what it means to be human. In many instances, we see faculty forced into professional development or students in their classrooms and divided by race, and forced to confess their status as oppressor or oppressed.

Today, almost 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* ushered in the Civil Rights Movement, there is an urgent need to reaffirm and advance its core principles. To insist on our common humanity. To demand that we are each entitled to equality under the law. To bring about a world in which we are all judged by the content of our character and not by the color of our skin.

It's important that our kids know they live in a good, if not great country, one that is not hostile to their dreams. Millions of kids of all races have embraced founding ideals around family, faith, hard work, entrepreneurship and education to move from persecution to prosperity. We acknowledge that America is not perfect, but we want to confront the inequities we face united rather than divided.

I would like to close by first reading Martin Luther King's address at the Centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. Here is what he said in the opening paragraph: "If our nation had done nothing more in its whole history than to create just two documents, its contribution to civilization would be imperishable. The first of these documents is the Declaration of Independence and the other is that which we are here to honor tonight, the Emancipation Proclamation. All tyrants, past, present and future, are powerless to bury the truths in these declarations, no matter how extensive their legions, how vast their power and how malignant their evil."

And finally, in Chapter thirteen of *Detoqueville's America*, he said "The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults." I have always found that statement compelling because it resonates with the notion that America is always in pursuit of becoming a more perfect union. While the founders laid out inspiring ideals, we are in constant effort to fully live up to them. But how we have made steady progress is through uniting around a common set of ideals; civil discourse; constructive disagreement, and a strong foundation in civic understanding.

Thank you.