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The teaching of African-American history is an essential piece of education for the 21st-century. In Maine we recognize that we can't know our state without knowing the history of Wabanaki people who first lived here and are an essential part of our community's rich mosaic. People of African heritage have also been here throughout—and contributed to shaping—Maine's history.

Beyond our own state, it's crucial for students to have a grasp of our country's past, both painful and glorious. African American history is American history. If we don't know African American history, we don't know who we are as Americans.

As a children's book writer and illustrator of books about diverse children and cultures, I have visited with thousands of students across our state, and seen their delight and enthusiasm as they discover the bigness of the world they live in. To meet the challenges of the future, our students must be equipped with an understanding of our history as a vibrantly multicultural, multiracial nation—our struggles, our triumphs, and the work yet to be done to fulfill our promise. This knowledge will help build the crucial skills needed to work in collaboration across racial and cultural differences in our increasingly global society.