

# Response: Decolonizing DCSD is necessary



By Travis Cantonwine

*Editor's note: This article has been written by Delta High School students. Throughout the school year, these students will contribute about one story a week to DCI. More student work can be viewed on the school's publication website: [deltapawprint.com](http://deltapawprint.com). If you have a suggestion for a topic to be covered, email [editor@deltacountyindependent.com](mailto:editor@deltacountyindependent.com).*

Marisa Edmonson, with organization partner Jordan Evans, is trying to reform the "lack of inclusive and supportive culture" of Delta County School District. They have created a platform to give a voice to alum, students, faculty and parents who have experienced racist interactions within the dis-

trict; hold those who inflict these actions accountable; introduce an accurate and un-whitewashed curriculum to the schools; and offer books to students that do not see themselves in literature. Last week I created a podcast that shared the goals of this platform for my journalism class. I interviewed Edmonson about her efforts to decolonize Delta County School District.

A respected group publisher, Dennis Anderson, wrote an opinion article in the Delta County Independent and Montrose Daily Press in September that shares the issues he has against Decolonizing Delta County School District. Within the article, the motives of Decolonizing DCSD are praised while their methods are criticized.

I have an issue with his article.

The main issue: Anderson simply did not educate himself on Decolonizing DCSD's goal. Opinions are valid, but what is not valid is possibly mitigating an important issue. Insulting one's intelligence is the last thing I want to do. But the

second to last thing I want to do is be silent, especially as a person who took the time to speak with Edmonson (for about an hour) on her intentions. While most looked through a rearview mirror on this platform, I found it imperative that I must listen and educate myself for the greater good of my community.

After the introduction of the article, Anderson clearly states, "to insist that certain authors or subjects have to be included in the curriculum is no different than insisting certain authors or subjects should not be included." This is simply a paradoxical take on a complicated issue. To put this into terms that students and teachers understand, this is equating addition to subtraction, although they are the opposite. To insist that certain authors have to be included in the curriculum is only equal to insisting that certain authors have to be included in the curriculum. If you think that diverse, new additions will downplay the same white authors, then you have a slight understanding of the emotions

associated with those who have not seen themselves in a book at school their whole life. And it is optional. The goal of DDCSD's library was to help teens of color, teens who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, and disabled teens see themselves in literature. And the best part about it is that the library is not meant to abolish other literature, but help give another side of the same story. Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou, Harriet Beecher Stowe and other African American writers who challenged the white superiority rhetoric they battled in their lifetime need to be celebrated. This does not mean that white authors and educators are less important.

Another issue I have with Anderson's article is the remark that since he personally has not seen racism in Delta County, it must not be an issue that needs accountability in the area. As you look back to the picture provided on both papers' websites, you may notice that Anderson is a white man. This obvious feature of Anderson is NOT a misled socioeconom-

ic assumption, but rather an inference that Anderson had not experienced these incidents because he is not a victim of these issues. I do recognize that I am, in fact, a white boy. But the difference is my willingness to use my privilege to uplift BIPOC (black, indigenous, and other people of color) voices, while still not degrading white voices. Edmonson and Evans are women of color who have experienced the inequity of the district, and they have dozens of testimonies to support that it is not a personal issue.

The last issue I have with the article is Anderson seemingly agreeing that "those who are marginalized due to socioeconomic status need special attention." Here, Anderson hits the nail on the head for the exact reasons that holding the district accountable and instituting an equal curriculum is necessary. The last sentence of the article specifically bothers me because after listing inequities that Decolonizing DCSD are trying to abolish, Anderson states that students don't need an anti-racist agenda

because they "live it in their everyday lives." If students and teachers did live this agenda everyday, the testimonies would not have been written. People, especially those like Edmonson and Evans, do not raise their voices on non-existent issues. Although Anderson recognizes an issue is present in the world, he does not recognize it in our community. And that is exactly why we must educate ourselves.

This is not written to embarrass Anderson. I actually adore his writing style and his stories in the DCI. But a voice as powerful as his being used to upset the efforts of Decolonizing DCSD is ignorant (which is human). The inaccuracy of the article shakes me up, two months later. If the time is there, please listen to the podcast sharing Edmonson's goals for the district on iTunes Podcasts and Google Podcasts. It is published under "The Deltapawprint's Podcast." Her voice, along with Evans', are the only ones that can truly show everyone their intentions, which are good.

## Rendering judgment? Let's take accountability

During my time as a human in a short seventeen years, I have only learned one thing about myself that shocked me: I can really get under a grown man's skin. I wrote an article in the Delta County Independent and Montrose Press criticizing publisher Dennis Anderson for his comments about an essential group working towards racial representation and equity in our county. In the article, only one time, I stated that since he is a white man, he does not understand the harsh racism of our county. His

response, that was nearly two times in length, can be summed up in the following way: I am not racist because I am older and I am German, so I go through similar inequities as a person of color in America. My article, in retrospect, was not about you being white, more was I ever thinking of you as someone who will intentionally hurt anyone based on the color of their skin, Anderson, but it was specifically about your failure to use this platform to uplift a harmless, truly good cause. Instead, you degraded it and tried

to boost your credibility by cataloging your war efforts and other personal experiences. Although I respect your experiences, you do not seem to respect my critiques of your "no racism" attitude. Sir, you need an "anti-racist" attitude. Color is REAL! We must appreciate it, and take accountability for our country's, and county's, problematic past! One last question for you Anderson: have you still not spoken with the wonderful Marisa Edmonson and Jordan Evans?

**Travis Cantonwine  
Austin**

## Majority vs. minority

How proud we all are with the eloquent guest column written by a Delta High School student. There are many returned Peace Corps members here in Delta County. It's not often that white people in the USA get to live as a minority. Learning to live in an unfamiliar country and welcomed with open arms, but one always knows that there are a few locals that are not quite as welcoming. Our schools need to also teach kindness and tolerance, remember that "prejudice is an emotional commitment to ignorance."

**Barbara Heck  
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# LETTERS

## Decolonizers need more education

In a guest column published recently in the DCI, high school student Travis Cantonwine suggests that we should all educate ourselves in the intentions of the organization, Decolonizing Delta County Schools. He includes Harriet Beecher Stowe in a group of what he says are African American authors that the decolonizers are demanding be included in the Delta County schools curriculum so that students of color can see themselves in literature.

It could be that the school curriculum actually is deficient because if they had read any U.S. history at all, these students would know that Harriet Beecher-Stowe

was not African American, but a white woman of Puritan descent who, a few years before the Civil War, wrote the very famous anti-slavery novel entitled "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which I was required to read in my high school American History class in 1966.

The book tells of the desperate journey of a young black woman escaping from slavery. The term "Uncle Tom," now still applied to blacks thought to be subservient to whites, was derived from the book's main character.

Nevertheless, the book was widely credited with helping to turn the tide of public opinion in the North decisively against slavery,

culminating in the Civil War, a bloody conflict in which many thousands of white people were maimed and killed fighting to end slavery, countless other white people risked their lives helping slaves escape via the Underground Railroad and other means.

While I don't doubt that Cantonwine, Edmonson, Evans and the other decolonizers mean well, I think they have a way to go in educating themselves before they are qualified to go around accusing people of not knowing what they are talking about, for no other reason than that they are white.

**Shari Dangremond  
Paonia**

# mile in a 57-year-old man's before rendering judgement

photo that accompanies my columns I am a white man. So when I say I have not witnessed racism in the Delta County School District it's because I am white and male. He left out the older age part of my disqualification.

But he's not the only one who recently has dismissed me from being qualified to discuss racism. I received an email from one reader who stated I don't know what I am talking about because I come from white privilege. That's a whole other column. Then there was the handwritten letter from a reader who scolded me for mentioning in another column that Lauren Boebert had to make a decision when in high school to complete her education or drop out and raise a child. Because I dare bring that up about Boebert's history, the letter writer labeled me a bigot and if Boebert was black, I would have celebrated her decision. I have no opinion one way or the other about Boebert's decision; it's just a fact of her past.

Bigotry, discrimination or racism is not limited to the color of one's skin. And to say that I haven't faced or witnessed these things is short sided. So is forcing someone to qualify themselves to join the conversation. But here we are.

I am the son of a German immigrant. My moth-

er married my father in Germany, a country of which she was a citizen until the day she died. She carried a green card just like anyone else who legally came to the United States. I, along with three of my four siblings, was born in Germany. Growing up as these facts were discovered I became the receiving end of some unwanted ridicule. I endured being called a Nazi, a kraut, Hitler's son, Hitler's grandson, and, most hurtful, a Jew killer. Most of these insults were hurled my way during my youth some extended into adulthood. Some were in jest while others were out of pure hatred. I know the sting of persecution merely because of my heritage. I spared my mother of these incidents because I knew she had her own hurdles to clear.

I could fill pages with discrimination that I have received or witnessed. Discrimination also can come via guilt by association. For example after my basic training and AIT in the Army I was sent to a small artillery base in Germany outside of the town of Herzogenaurach. As an 18-year-old kid in January 1982, Herzo base would be my home for the next 18 months.

I was assigned a room in the barracks with two Black men. Herbie T. was from Moss Point, Mis-

issippi and Carlyle was from Pittsburgh. Herbie was smooth and well liked on base while Carlyle was brash and pulled no punches when he interacted with others.

A couple of weeks into my new room assignment, I was invited to hang out with three white guys in their room. Herbie warned me that these were dudes with bad intentions and to be careful.

Walking into their room was like walking into a bad movie scene. A large confederate flag was hanging on the wall, the lighting was dim and Black Sabbath blasted in the background. A bottle of Jack Daniels was being passed around between the three guys. I was invited to partake but passed. It was too eerie. That night I was warned about associating with my roommates or any others who were of a different skin color. If I did, then there would be repercussions. I didn't heed the warnings and there were consequences both physically and mentally. This would last for the next few months until two of the three were caught in a murder plot of a black medic who was also gay.

We were on a training exercise when one of the two men came to the medic and said there was a terrible accident at the motor pool. The medic was

being driven to the scene in a jeep at a high rate of speed when the other of the two men appeared from the back seat where he was hidden under blankets. When the medic realized he wasn't being taken to the motor pool for his medical skills, he jumped from the jeep and hid in the forest. The next morning when it was discovered the medic wasn't in formation, our unit went to search for him. He was found slightly wounded and severely shaken by the experience. Then a grave dug by the two white men with a backhoe was discovered in the motor pool. They were arrested and the rest of mine and others' experience on Herzo base became a lot more peaceful.

Lastly, I have three good reasons why I would want the DCSD to be free of discrimination. That is my three grandchildren who currently attend. Adrianna Zavala is a freshman at Delta High School, Jordyn Zavala is a seventh grader at Delta Middle School and Hailey Lopez is a fifth grader at Lincoln Elementary School. While they are not biologically mine, they are mine nonetheless. I love them as deeply as a person can. I don't label them as people of color nor do I want them to think of themselves as such. Although

I want them to be very proud of their heritage, I also want them to live in a world where color isn't an obstacle or a card for advancement. My desire is for them to be successful however they define success for themselves based on their goals and their willingness to work hard to achieve said goals. I want them to be upstanding members of our community and someday hopefully raising their own wonderful children. I'm very proud of the people they are and it brings me great joy to watch them grow. DCSD is a big part of that growth.

We will never move forward in the battle against discrimination if we exclude anyone from the conversation or disqualify them because they are white, hispanic or any other background. This is really an excellent coaching moment for Cantonwine and others who make presumptions about an opinion based on the color of one's skin. Together through meaningful dialog we can make this world a better place for future generations.

*Dennis Anderson is group publisher for Wick Communications, Alaska and Colorado. He can be reached via email at dennis.anderson@frontiersman.com.*