



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on December 9, 2021

USA Today Stokes Fires of Racism With “Is Math Racist?” Headline

Math just used to be math. It was such a matter-of-fact part of life that people used it to refer to things that just are what they are — such as using the phrase “two plus two is four” to indicate the logic of a known fact. But that was before Critical Race Theory (CRT) and BLM and the racial politicization of nearly everything. Math just used to be math; now, it’s racist. Or at least it is possibly racist, according to *USA Today*.

In an online article published Tuesday under the headline, “Is math racist? As many students of color struggle with the subject, schools are altering instruction — sometimes amid intense debate,” *USA Today* led readers to the poisoned well of CRT math where racism hides behind basic equations. Sure, two plus two is four, but you are a racist for wanting that information relayed to black students in a way that does not acknowledge — and even celebrate — their blackness and victimhood status.



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The article opens with the story of Nadine Ebri, who teaches algebra in Jacksonville, Florida. It begins:

Algebra classes taught by Nadine Ebri look different than the ones you probably took in school.

Students practice equations through singing, dancing and drawing. Activities are sculpted around their hobbies and interests: anime, gaming, Minecraft. Problem-solving is a team sport, rather than an individual sprint to the right answer.

Ebri, a math teacher and tech specialist for Duval County Schools in Florida, is using new techniques designed to promote equity. If kids of color, girls and low-income students engage, they’ll be more likely to pursue high-level math classes, the argument goes. That can open doors to competitive colleges and lucrative careers.

After Ebri switched to emphasizing real-world problems and collaboration, her students, most of whom are Black, improved their scores on Florida’s math exam in 2020-21 — even with 1 in 3 learning from home.

Making education a “team sport” with rules and “new techniques designed to promote equity” seems to be little more than a way to pass failing students — after all, what kid can’t “win” if he can skate by on the correct answers from stronger “teammates” in a game that is designed to “promote equity” by



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propping up weaker students? What it will *not* do is address the actual education of students. While those students will “get by” and get through school on the illusion that they are learning, the only “lesson” they will really take away is the lie that they require a different set of rules or they can’t play. Because they are being taught that they are not [as smart as white kids](#).

In an effort to make everything about race and race about everything, the *USA Today* piece addresses what it calls a “heated issue” — “the extent to which math education should include real-world problems involving racial and social inequities.” One is left to imagine the types of “math problems” that could address such things. “If Michael Sullivan leaves Chicago on a westbound train going 60 miles per hour and travels for 2 hours, is the white conductor a racist?” Yes. And so is Michael Sullivan.

The idea of basing basic math problems on “real-world problems involving racial and social inequities” reminds this writer of an episode of that theatrical masterpiece known as [Different Strokes](#). Titled “Prep School,” the episode (Season One, Episode Four) showed the wealthy Mr. Drummond attempting to get his two adopted black sons, Willis and Arnold, into his prep school *alma mater*, Digby. They fail the entrance exam and explain to Drummond that it was due to “trick questions” such as “What does the blindfolded lady with the scales represent?” Instead of answering “the American legal system,” Willis said, “The scales meant she was in the market and the blindfold meant she didn’t want to see the butcher rip her off.” Similarly, Arnold was asked, “How many people could sleep in a house with three bedrooms and a double bed in each room?” His answer was 18. He explained to Drummond, “We know people who get three in a bed, two on the floor, six in the couches, and one in the bathroom.”

Somehow, Drummond — who ostensibly received a good education and has done well in business — comes to the conclusion that the test was not fair, since it does not account for boys who grew up in the ghetto. He and the boys put the headmaster through their own “test” comprised of ghetto wisdom and slang definitions to “prove” their point.

That made for cheap laughs in 1978, but would certainly not have prepared either Willis or Arnold to move forward and do well in life. (Though, in retrospect, neither of the actors who played them did very well, either.)

Alas, the good folks over at *USA Today* seem somehow to still think that by making math about the politics of racism they can “help” poor black kids do better. In reality, doing so is itself racist, because it begins with the proposition that black kids cannot be expected to learn something as hard as math unless it is made into a hip-hop musical or a “team” video game.

After the article was published, Twitter lost its mind and took *USA Today* to task. *USA Today* responded by altering the headline to read, “Is math education racist? Debate rages over changes to how US teaches the subject.”

The article is behind a paywall, so unless you are one of the 12 people who would actually *pay* to read *USA Today*, you won’t be able to read it. But having read it for you, this writer can assure you the only thing you’re missing is the same soft-core liberal white racism you can find almost anywhere these days.



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