



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 2, 2014

## Middle-school Teacher Suspended for Showing Class “Black Face” Video

Parents of middle school students in the southeastern Michigan community of Monroe have persuaded the school district to reinstate a history teacher who had been suspended for showing a video that demonstrated how white entertainers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries painted their faces to depict black people in their song and dance acts.

Popular teacher Alan Barron, who is set to retire after 36 years of teaching, was placed on “administrative leave” two weeks before the end of the school year as district officials investigated whether or not his teaching methods and curriculum on black history were inappropriate because of some of the content. According to the [Monroe News](#), the suspension happened nearly two weeks after “an assistant principal sat in on his history class while Mr. Barron was discussing the Jim Crow racial segregation laws. As part of the instruction, he showed a video of how white people back then used blackface to imitate African-Americans during what they considered entertainment in the 1800s.”

While the unidentified assistant principal was so offended by the “racist” content of the video that he demanded in front of students that Barron stop the video, parents of the students — including one married to an African-American — thought differently and stepped forward to defend Barron and to demand his reinstatement.

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The lesson “had nothing to do with racism,” Adrienne Aaron, whose husband is black and whose daughter is one of Barron’s students, told the *Monroe News*. “History is history. We need to educate our kids to see how far we’ve come in America. How is that racism?” She added that Barron is “one of the best teachers we’ve had. We can’t believe that this is happening.”

The local paper reported that district officials had met with Barron, who also serves as the Monroe Township supervisor, but the officials refused to acknowledge that he had been suspended, or the reason, saying simply that the veteran educator had been placed “on leave.” A district statement only acknowledged that Barron “has been on leave for about a week while we look into a reported situation in his classroom. Because this is a personnel matter that is going through the teacher-contract required





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steps, we cannot comment any further.”

Parents, however, were well aware of the source of the conflict, and took to Facebook to stand up for Barron. “Mr. Barron is one of the ... great teachers we have in Monroe Public Schools,” wrote one parent in a letter posted through Facebook. “He has changed many children’s lives over the course of his career. If Mr. Barron felt that he was teaching something that was offensive, he would most definitely not have done it.”

The campaign, which included student-made T-shirts in support of Barron, paid off. On June 2 the [Monroe News reported](#) that, as of the previous day (Sunday), Barron had been reinstated to his teaching position and was back in his classroom on Monday. “I have no words that can express my gratitude and thanks for the support you have shown toward me during this turbulent time of my career,” Barron wrote on his Facebook page. “Each day I preach to my students far more than history. I preach about choices, commitment, and community service as I try to practice what I teach.”

In a face-saving move, the district’s superintendent, Dr. Barry Martin, insisted in a phone message and via the district’s Facebook page: “As a result of incorrect information presented within the community, there is a perception that the district was opposed to a teacher providing students with information about the history of racial issues in this country. This simply is not true and is a misinterpretation of the concern.”

But Barron’s attorney, C.J. Horkey, confirmed that his client had been suspended because of his teaching methods regarding black history. “Mr. Horkey acknowledged that Mr. Barron was indeed suspended because he showed a 29-second minstrel show video that demonstrated how performers once used black-face for entertainment,” reported the *Monroe News*.

Contrary to the district’s apparent assumptions regarding his teaching, however, Barron’s use of the video clip had no racist overtones. “It was a lesson on stereotypes,” explained Horkey to the local paper.





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