



A RESOLUTION ON DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO TEACH ABOUT RACE, LGBTQIA+, AND GENDER ISSUES (22/11)

- WHEREAS** state legislative proposals are being introduced and passed across the United States to limit academic discussions of race, LGBTQIA+, and gender issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities, often based on the belief that a candid and full discussion of them would be “divisive”;
- WHEREAS** our students, staff, and faculty often come from the racial and LGBTQIA+ communities addressed in these proposals;
- WHEREAS** the successful imposition of restrictions and limits on the teaching of these important issues may lead to similar restrictions and limits on the teaching of other significant issues;
- WHEREAS** GWU’s faculty affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, as described in the American Association of University Professors’ [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#);
- WHEREAS** faculty have primary responsibility for the curriculum at their universities;
- WHEREAS** the term “divisive”, which multiple state legislatures have used prevents honest treatment of the historical facts of race in the United States, is indeterminate, subjective, and chills the capacity of educators to promote the development of essential critical thinking skills;
- WHEREAS** educating students about systemic barriers to realizing a multiracial and multicultural democracy should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century to produce engaged and informed students and citizens;
- WHEREAS** over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the [Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History](#) (June 16, 2021) stating their “firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities The clear goal of these efforts is to suppress teaching and learning about the role of racism in the history of the United States. . . . Educators must provide an accurate view of the past in order to better prepare students for community participation and robust civic engagement. . . . In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed,

professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning.”;

WHEREAS in a nation that has for centuries struggled with issues of racial inequity and injustice, many students do not have adequate knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQIA+ history and the policies that contributed to inequities; and

WHEREAS GWU is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and incorporating these threatened concepts in our teaching;¹

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE FACULTY SENATE OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

1. That the Senate supports the faculty at universities impacted or potentially impacted by legislation or Boards of Trustees’ policies in resolutely rejecting any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to gender, racial and social justice, and in standing firm against encroachment on faculty authority by legislatures or the Boards of Trustees;
2. That the Senate stands with our K-12 colleagues throughout the country who may be affected by legislation that limits or restricts their ability to fully, honestly, and candidly teach about matters involving race, gender and sexual identity in age-appropriate ways in their classes;
3. That the Senate calls upon President Wrighton and Provost Bracey to affirm that they support educators across the country in rejecting any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and standing firm against encroachment on faculty authority by legislatures or the Boards of Trustees; and
4. That the Senate endorses and affirms the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#), authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.²

Committee on Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom
March 21, 2022

Adopted as amended by the Faculty Senate
April 8, 2022

¹ Senate resolution 21/7. <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/0/196/files/2020/07/Res-21-7-final-adopted-1.pdf>

² Appendix 1

Resolution 22/11 Background

Resolution 22/11 aims to address a specific issue: the ways that state legislatures are targeting both universities and K-12 education in an effort to limit the teaching and/or discussion of basic fundamentals of this country's history and social conditions where those discussions intersect with issues to do with race, gender, and sexuality.³

Such targeting has attempted to squelch the ability of teachers in K-12 and in universities to have honest examination of these issues because, the legislatures claim, such topics honestly treated are “divisive.” Often what is treated as allowed by state legislatures as “non-divisive” are curricula that deny historical facts.⁴

In response to this specific problem, namely the effort by legislatures to pretend that gagging teachers on the topics of race, gender, and sexuality is somehow apolitical, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and seventy academic associations have taken a stand to allow teachers the right to address these subjects honestly. (See Appendix 1)

What the AAUP, American Historical Association (AHA), and the other associated academic bodies recognize in their joint statement is that state legislatures are not attacking the freedom to teach on just any issue, but on the particular topics of race, gender, and sexuality.

This resolution thus calls for affirming and endorsing the AAUP/AHA statement as well as the spirit that motivated the statement.

³ Among others, Andy Sher, “Tennessee Bill Puts Public Colleges at Legal Risk over Mandated ‘divisive Concepts’ for Students, Employees,” *Timesfreepress.Com*, February 15, 2022, <https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2022/feb/15/tennessee-bill-puts-public-colleges-legal-risk/563436/>. Amendment 1 to Tennessee HB2670 and SB2290 provides, “the institution may terminate the employee's employment pursuant to the employment agreement or [§ 49-8-303](#), whichever is applicable”; “Georgia Bill Banning ‘divisive Concepts’ on Race in Schools Advances,” <https://www.onlineathens.com/story/news/2022/02/09/georgia-bill-banning-divisive-concepts-race-schools-advances/6725774001/>; “Bill against ‘divisive Concepts’ Linked to CRT in College Goes to Noem,” accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2022/03/07/bill-against-divisive-concepts-linked-critical-race-theory-colleges-goes-kristi-noem-desk/9417153002/>; “Va. House Delegates Pass Ban on ‘Divisive Concepts’ from Being Taught in Schools,” WTOP News, February 16, 2022, <https://wtop.com/virginia/2022/02/va-house-delegates-pass-ban-on-divisive-concepts-from-being-taught-in-schools/>. “In His Fight against ‘Woke’ Schools, DeSantis Tears at the Seams of a Diverse Florida,” *Washington Post*, accessed March 9, 2022, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/07/desantis-anti-woke-act/>.

⁴ “As House Candidate, DeSantis Penned Racially Charged Book Excusing Slavery,” *American Ledger*, October 8, 2018, <https://american-ledger.com/accountability/as-house-candidate-desantis-penned-racially-charged-book-excusing-slavery/>; Rebecca Klein, “The Rightwing US Textbooks That Teach Slavery as ‘Black Immigration,’” *The Guardian*, August 12, 2021, sec. Education, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/aug/12/right-wing-textbooks-teach-slavery-black-immigration>.

Appendix 1: <https://www.aaup.org/news/joint-statement-efforts-restrict-education-about-racism#.Yiadti2z1Ta>

Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism

At a time when the country is confronting deep-rooted racial inequity and having overdue conversations about our history, legislators in a number of states have moved to restrict teaching about oppression, race, and gender.

We strongly oppose these efforts to stifle education about racism and American history in schools, colleges, and universities. Along with more than seventy other organizations who have signed on to a statement authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, we affirm that Americans of all ages deserve nothing less than a free and open exchange about history and the forces that shape our world today. Read the joint statement below.

Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History

June 16, 2021

We, the undersigned associations and organizations, state our firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities. These efforts have taken varied shape in at least 20 states, but often the legislation aims to prohibit or impede the teaching and education of students concerning what are termed “divisive concepts.” These divisive concepts as defined in numerous bills are a litany of vague and indefinite buzzwords and phrases including, for example, “that any individual should feel or be made to feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological or emotional distress on account of that individual's race or sex.” These legislative efforts are deeply troubling for numerous reasons.

First, these bills risk infringing on the right of faculty to teach and of students to learn. The clear goal of these efforts is to suppress teaching and learning about the role of racism in the history of the United States. Purportedly, any examination of racism in this country’s classrooms might cause some students “discomfort” because it is an uncomfortable and complicated subject. But the ideal of informed citizenship necessitates an educated public. Educators must provide an accurate view of the past in order to better prepare students for community participation and robust civic engagement. Suppressing or watering down discussion of “divisive concepts” in educational institutions deprives students of opportunities to discuss and foster solutions to social division and injustice. Legislation cannot erase “concepts” or history; it can, however, diminish educators’ ability to help students address facts in an honest and open environment capable of nourishing intellectual exploration. Educators owe students a clear-eyed, nuanced, and frank delivery of history so that they can learn, grow, and confront the issues of the day, not hew to some state-ordered ideology.

Second, these legislative efforts seek to substitute political mandates for the considered judgment of professional educators, hindering students’ ability to learn and engage in critical thinking across differences and disagreements. These regulations constitute an inappropriate attempt to transfer responsibility for the evaluation of a curriculum and subject matter from educators to elected officials. The purpose of education is to serve the common good by promoting open inquiry and advancing human knowledge. Politicians in a democratic society should not manipulate public school curricula to advance partisan or ideological aims. In higher education, under principles of

academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning.

Knowledge of the past exists to serve the needs of the living. In the current context, this includes an honest reckoning with all aspects of that past. Americans of all ages deserve nothing less than a free and open exchange about history and the forces that shape our world today, an exchange that should take place inside the classroom as well as in the public realm generally. To ban the tools that enable those discussions is to deprive us all of the tools necessary for citizenship in the 21st century. A white-washed view of history cannot change what happened in the past. A free and open society depends on the unrestricted pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

Signed,

American Association of University Professors
American Historical Association
Association of American Colleges & Universities
PEN America

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
ACPA-College Student Educators International
African American Intellectual History Society
African Studies Association
Agricultural History Society
Alcohol and Drugs History Society
American Academy of Religion
American Anthropological Association
American Association for State and Local History
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of Geographers
American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education
American Catholic Historical Association
American Classical League
American Council of Learned Societies
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
American Counseling Association
American Educational Research Association
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Folklore Society
American Humor Studies Association
American Library Association
American Philosophical Association
American Political Science Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Society for Engineering Education
American Society for Environmental History
American Society for Theatre Research

American Society of Criminology Executive Board
American Sociological Association
American Studies Association
Anti-Defamation League
Association for Ancient Historians
Association for Asian American Studies
Association for Asian Studies
Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
Association for Documentary Editing
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies
Association for the Study of African American Life and History
Association for the Study of Higher Education
Association for the Study of Literature and Environment
Association for Theatre in Higher Education
Association of Academic Museums and Galleries
Association of African American Museums
Association of College and Research Libraries
Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Research Libraries
Association of University Presses
Association of Writers & Writing Programs
Berkshire Conference of Women Historians
Business History Conference
Center for Research Libraries
Central European History Society
Chinese Historians in the United States
ClassCrits, Inc.
Coalition of Urban & Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)
College Art Association
Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender History
Comparative & International Education Society
Conference on Asian History
Conference on Faith and History
Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes
Contemporary Freudian Society
Coordinating Council for Women in History
Council on Social Work Education
Czechoslovak Studies Association
Dance Studies Association
Executive Committee of the American Comparative Literature Association
Forum on Early-Modern Empires and Global Interactions
French Colonial Historical Society
German Studies Association
Higher Learning Commission
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Historical Society of Twentieth Century China

Immigration Ethnic History Society
International Studies Association
International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation
Italian American Studies Association
John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education
Keats-Shelley Association of America
Labor and Working-Class History Association
Middle East Studies Association
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
Midwestern History Association
Modern Language Association
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of Dean and Directors Schools of Social Work
National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education
National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
National Association of Social Workers
National Coalition for History
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council on Public History
National Education Association
Network for Public Education
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
National Women's Studies Association
New England Commission of Higher Education
North American Conference on British Studies
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Ohio Academy of History
Organization of American Historians
Pacific Coast Branch-American Historical Association
Peace History Society
Phi Beta Kappa Society
Popular Culture Association
Radical History Review
Rhetoric Society of America
Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Scholars at Risk
Shakespeare Association of America
Society for Austrian and Habsburg History
Society for Classical Studies
Society for Community Research and Action
Society for Ethnomusicology
Society for French Historical Studies
Society for Historians of the Early American Republic
Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

Society for Historical Archaeology
Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and Gender
Society for the Study of Social Problems
Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States
Society for US Intellectual History
Society of American Historians
Society of Architectural Historians
Society of Civil War Historians
Society of Transnational Academic Researchers (STAR Scholars Network)
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
Southern Historical Association
The Authors Guild
The Freedom to Read Foundation
United Faculty of Florida - University of Florida, NEA/AFT/FEA, AFL-CIO
University Film and Video Association
Urban History Association
WASC Senior College and University Commission
Western History Association
Western Society for French History
Women in French
World History Association

Publication Date:

Wednesday, June 16, 2021