

April 3, 2017

Governor Asa Hutchinson
State Capitol Room 250
500 Woodlane Ave.
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Governor Hutchinson,

It has come to the attention of the American Historical Association that the agenda of the Education Committee of the Arkansas General Assembly includes HB 1834, which would prohibit any Arkansas public school “from including in its curriculum or course materials for a program of study books or any other material authorized by or concerning Howard Zinn.” I hope that you will advise your allies in the legislature to oppose this egregious micromanagement of the work of Arkansas teachers, in addition to the intrusion into their classrooms and curricula.

The AHA is the largest association of professional historians in the world. Our 12,000 members include college professors, secondary school teachers, advanced students, and public historians working in museums, national parks, and innumerable other venues. The professional standards we articulate and promote are cited frequently inside and outside the academy. These standards include the participation of professional historians in the development of guidelines or requirements for history education. Just as the state of Arkansas would surely reject the legislative prescription of medical texts or specific athletic practice routines without consulting professionals in those disciplines, it should not make decisions about the teaching of history without comparable consultation. The American Historical Association encourages the state to step lightly in its prescription of educational content and to consult with professional historians before issuing instructions as to the details of history education, whether in the public schools or other venues such as state parks or monuments.

The central issue regarding this legislation is not the quality of Professor Zinn’s scholarship. Assessments of his work vary among professional scholars, and the AHA would be happy to recommend highly qualified peer reviewers in Arkansas to participate in any aspect of curriculum development, design, or review. The Texas Board of Education, for example, has recently expressed its gratitude for our assistance in its textbook review process. We can offer names of historians teaching at all education levels and working in various institutions beyond the classroom.

I hope that the bill never reaches your desk. If it does, I strongly urge a veto in the interest of the integrity of public education in Arkansas.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
Executive Director