

July 29, 2021

Governor Mike DeWine
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Gov. DeWine,

The American Historical Association registers strong objection to Ohio HB 322 and HB 327, acts relating to the social studies curriculum in public schools. These bills are part of a misguided, nationally coordinated attempt to put the government in classrooms at every level from kindergarten through high school—and in the case of HB 327, through higher education—to intimidate teachers, and to indoctrinate students rather than helping them learn the inquiry-based skills that will prepare them for their future civic and professional lives.

In a joint [statement](#) co-signed by 145 organizations, the American Historical Association condemns such bills for “substitut[ing] political mandates for the considered judgment of professional educators” and “hindering students’ ability to learn and engage in critical thinking across difference and disagreements.”

The bills are a tangle of contradictory mandates. For example, HB 327 allows teachers to discuss US Supreme Court decisions, yet HB 322 requires that no teachers shall teach or believe that “With respect to their relationship to American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality.” This clause would prohibit teaching the landmark *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision (1857), in which the Supreme Court held that the founders of the United States believed Black people “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” It would also prohibit the teaching of the US Constitution, which includes passages ensuring the temporary continuation of the slave trade and counting for Census purposes an enslaved person as three-fifths of a free person—clauses that were critical to the Constitution’s adoption.

As a result, HB 322 and HB 327 would erase content students need to succeed at every level. In high school, for example, students in courses that lack analysis of the continuing impact of racism would have no opportunity to learn the full history of either the American Revolution or the Civil War. They would miss the basic historical information needed to pass Advanced Placement tests, and they would be unable to gain early college credit by taking qualified dual-credit courses at local colleges.

American history is steeped in divisions and conflicts shaped by ideas about race and by cultures and institutional structures that perpetuate those divisions. This is fact, not theory or ideology. Ignoring fundamental sources of division and conflict in any nation’s history requires ignoring the most careful and most up-to-date historical scholarship.

None of this damage, of course, is the actual purpose of this legislation, much of which is couched in barely concealed euphemisms. This is about whitewashing American history, keeping to the margins (or excluding altogether) such central issues as slavery; forced removals of Native Americans; inequalities based on race, gender, and other characteristics; and other aspects of our past likely to inspire the vigorous discussion that characterizes a good history class. If a teacher cannot teach or assign “fault, blame, or bias . . . on the basis of race or sex,” as HB 322 dictates, how are students to understand who owned human property and who were enslaved? Or the role of the “white primary” in the disfranchisement of African Americans? Or arguments over whether women, of any race, were fit to vote?

The language of these bills makes it clear that the cosponsors misunderstand the purpose and practice of history education. With few exceptions, teachers are not indoctrinating students in a particular view of history; they are giving students the information, sources, and skills they need to reach their own conclusions about the past. Doing so requires teaching historical facts that might make some students uncomfortable—something these bills would make illegal.

As participants in the American experiment, we should not be afraid to face the hard truths that history teaches us. These sloppily written bills, based on model legislation drafted by activist organizations in Washington, DC, will not in any way benefit Ohio school children, college students, or other residents. Instead, they will prohibit the full and accurate teaching of American history in Ohio classrooms. No goal could embody American ideals any less.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Jones
President



James R. Grossman
Executive Director