

A CALL TO ACTION

American democracy is under attack – and educators at every level are on the front lines of the new culture wars.

Reactionary and opportunistic politicians and operatives tied to the Republican party hope to mobilize voters in 2022 by demonizing efforts to teach about racism and other forms of oppression that have deformed America's past. In more than twenty states, they have already banned such supposedly "divisive concepts" as critical race theory from our schools. Worse than McCarthyism, which only targeted individual dissidents, these educational gag rules directed against our classrooms and syllabi are an unprecedented assault on academic freedom and the professional integrity of historians.

We must act NOW! We cannot stand by and let politicians distort the truth.

1. What are we asking?

As right-wing attacks on educators spread across the United States, we call on faculty members to stand up for academic freedom by urging their university senates, councils, union locals, or similar faculty groups to oppose these repressive measures. We are supporting a campaign organized by the [African American Policy Forum](#) to promote a resolution entitled "Defending Academic Freedom to Teach About Race and Gender Justice and Critical Race Theory." We hope that faculties will customize this resolution for their campuses and then have their faculty senates or similar official bodies pass it and ask their administrators and trustees to affirm it.

2. How does the AAPF's campaign operate?

This is a national effort designed to show that the academic community is united in its opposition to the current culture wars. The campaign calls on faculty members to ask their Faculty Senates/Councils or other official bodies to pass resolutions that not only oppose the educational gag rules being implemented across the country, but also encourage their institutions' leaders to show their support for academic freedom by endorsing those resolutions as well.

This project is significant because it stimulates collective action on the part of faculty members, who ordinarily tend to remain passive about threats to academic freedom and governance until they confront a crisis in their own schools or states. Today's culture wars are such a blatant violation of the academy's values that a measure enabling the academic community to express its disapproval and opposition should gain considerable traction.

3. Why should we pass academic freedom resolutions if our own institutions are not threatened?

These resolutions ramp up the academy's general opposition to the current culture wars. They are an expression of solidarity with all those teachers from K-12 to colleges and universities who are under attack. Academic freedom resolutions have the additional advantage of enhancing faculty governance by showing administrators and trustees that their faculties are willing to act collectively on this issue. If faculties adopt such a resolution, the leaders of their institutions may think twice about giving in to outside pressure. This is what happened last fall

when the [University of Florida administration](#)'s attempt to keep several professors from testifying before the state legislature encountered immediate resistance within the university, created a national tsunami of outrage, and cost the UF president his job.

4. Are Faculty Senate/Council academic freedom resolutions effective?

Even as we write, the AAPF's campaign – spearheaded by a trio of AAPF and AAUP activists — is making an impact, as these articles from the [Washington Post](#) and [Inside Higher Ed](#) reveal. Already the faculty senates at more than twenty colleges and universities – among them DePaul, Jackson State, Michigan State, North Dakota State, Ohio State, Penn State, Portland State, Queensborough Community College (CUNY) and the universities of Alabama, Colorado (system-wide), Delaware, Minnesota, Mississippi, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin, as well as the American Studies Association – have passed academic freedom-resolutions and, in many cases, had them affirmed by their administrations. Meanwhile, faculty groups at other institutions have responded favorably. Their resolutions are progressing through the system and are likely to be acted on soon.

These actions represent significant victories. At the University of Colorado, for example, the Academic Freedom resolution, passed overwhelmingly by the system-wide Faculty Council and the Boulder Faculty General Assembly, prevented the Board of Regents from adopting a wide-ranging measure to ban nine controversial concepts dealing with race, ethnicity, and gender from the university's training and academic programs.

5. How can I help launch this campaign?

Spread the word! Contact as many friends and sympathetic colleagues as possible in your department, union local, AAUP chapter, or other faculty group to ask your Faculty Senate or other official body to pass an anti-gag rule resolution. Reach out as well to your networks of colleagues at other colleges and universities. The more people involved, the stronger our voices will be.

You do not have to reinvent the wheel. Here are some sample resolutions and other materials that you can copy and/or alter to fit the needs of your own institution. The [Minnesota Resolution](#), for example, is particularly cogent and might be a useful template for other faculty groups to crib from along with the other [documents](#) and templates that the AAPF campaign has produced and posted on its website. If you would like additional background information, see the excellent [PEN report](#) and its recent [update](#).

Finally, if you have any questions, please contact [Valerie Johnson](#) professor of political science at DePaul University, or [Jennifer Ruth](#), professor of film studies at Portland State University.

In solidarity,

[Molly Nolan](#), [Margaret Power](#), [Ellen Schrecker](#)

For the Steering Committee of the Historians for Peace and Democracy