



December 5, 2023

Statement by the past, current, and future presidents of the [Organization of American Historians](#) on Ohio Senate Bill 83.

As leaders of the largest organization of historians of the United States—its people, its creeds, and its conflicts—we strongly oppose the reintroduction of the Ohio Senate Bill 83, known as the “Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act.” This bill, first passed and then defeated or delayed last May, 2023, is now once again before the Ohio legislature. Under the guise of advocating “free speech” and “intellectual diversity,” this bill is more an ongoing effort by a particular political faction to use culture-war wedge issues to restrict academic freedom, open inquiry, and the teaching of research-based American history.

Bill 83 as presented claims that Ohio public university campuses, and by extension all American colleges, are places where conservative views, texts and approaches to history are not welcome. We categorically reject that assertion. The OAH is devoted to the study of the American past from all approaches, methods, and perspectives. The bill suggests that the teaching of the historical development of such issues as climate science, reproductive health, and even major conflicts in foreign affairs are too “controversial” to be allowed in classrooms—a position counter to leading data that Americans want to learn about and discuss complicated historical and contemporary topics.

The bill further specifically demands the elimination of most Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs at Ohio colleges. While we recognize that DEI practices can vary widely and are sometimes controversial, they also do great good in protecting and advancing the cause of American pluralism, one of the country’s greatest enduring ideals. While advocating “free speech,” the authors of this bill would prohibit universities themselves from issuing official statements on what it deems “public controversies,” a position that violates the very idea of why universities exist.

Finally, and of particular interest to OAH historians, Senate bill 83 would require the teaching of certain classic American texts such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Federalist Papers. While we too hope all American students will read these important texts in multiple contexts, we harbor no fear that they will not stand the tests of time, whether required by a group of politicians in Ohio or not. Please note that as historians, we endorse broadly the “enhancement” of United States’ history in all of its varieties. As the great American philosopher William James, wrote in his 1909 *What Pragmatism Means*, “the only enemy of any one of my truths is the rest of my truths.”

As historians we believe in the open mind and we strongly urge the defeat of Ohio Senate Bill 83, which would close or restrict, much more than enhance understanding of the United States. We stand at the ready to assist the legislators and educators of Ohio to further this critical work.

Respectfully,

David W. Blight, President-Elect
Philip Deloria, Past President
Annette Gordon-Reed, Vice President
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Erika Lee, Immediate Past President