

Testimony of Dr. Chris Crews
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 19, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Chris Crews, and I am a professor at Denison University, where I teach in the International Studies and Writing programs. I am also the founder of Ohioans for Critical Race Theory, and I am submitting my testimony in this capacity in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

There are so many problems with this bill it is hard to know where to start, so let me begin with some friendly observations. I applaud Senator Cirino's stated goal of improving higher education in Ohio and the importance of a strong foundation in civic literacy and US history for Ohioans. I suspect most people here today would agree with these sentiments. Sec. 3345.382 (318-345) of SB 83 calls for a new required US history or government class. I think this idea has merit, but should not be lumped in with this otherwise problematic bill. Regardless, to the list of required text I would suggest adding some or all of the following foundational documents:

- *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* - W.E.B. DuBois
- *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* - Frederick Douglas
- *The Red Record - Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* - Ida B. Wells-Barnett
- *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* - David Walker
- *The Declaration of Sentiments by the Seneca Falls Conference* (1848)
- *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of 1000 Witnesses* - American Anti-Slavery Society
- *South Carolina Declaration of Causes of Secession* (1860)
- *Cornerstone Speech of 1861* - Alexander H. Stephens
- *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* - Mary Harris Jones
- *Declaration of Constitutional Principles (Southern Manifesto)* of 1956

- *The Ballot or the Bullet* - Malcolm X
- *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977)
- *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* - Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- *A People's History of the United States* - Howard Zinn
- *The Story of American Freedom* - Eric Foner
- *A Patriot's History of the United States* - Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen
- *Voices of the U.S. Latino Experience* - Rodolfo Acuña and Guadalupe Compeán
- *Milestone Documents in American History: Exploring the Primary Sources That Shaped America* - Kelli McCoy (Editor)

In addition, I would encourage you to include some or all of the following key historical laws and cases in the list of required text for this proposed new course:

- Fugitive Slave Act of 1793
- Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
- Civil Rights Act of 1866
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Worcester v. Georgia (1832) - Indigenous Cherokee sovereignty
- Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857) - slavery in new states & Black legal rights
- Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) - upheld racial segregation
- U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923) - upheld race-based citizenship
- Korematsu v. United States (1944) - wartime imprisonment
- Brown v. Board of Education (1954) - school integration
- Roe v Wade (1973) - reproductive rights
- Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978) - upheld affirmative action
- Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) - LGBTQ marriage rights

This brief list does not even begin to scratch the surface of the diverse political and social histories of the United States, but the inclusion of such works would ensure Ohio students are provided a diverse range of intellectual ideas and histories to meet the stated goal of this bill,

which is to ensure "free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth" and the fundamental role that universities play in equipping "students with the intellectual skills they need to reach their own, informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance."

Now let me briefly turn to two areas of particular concern, the biased targeting of select beliefs and ideas opposed by some conservatives, and the specific targeting of China.

Sec. 3345.0217 (182-286) of SB 83 deals with what is defined as "controversial belief or policy," "intellectual diversity," specified concepts," and "specified ideology." According to the bill, this includes "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate change, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion" (183-187). Further, this same section (B)(6) requires schools to adopt a policy that will "Affirm and guarantee that it will not endorse, oppose, comment, or take action, as an institution, on the public policy controversies of the day, or any other ideology, principle, concept, or formulation that requires commitment to any controversial belief or policy, specified concept, or specified ideology" (229-234).

As someone who teaches courses that cover both US and international history, culture, economics, and politics, I cannot think of a single "belief or policy" that is not "the subject to political controversy." I suspect the vagueness of this language is intentional, although I would love to hear from Senator Cirino if he could identify any "belief or policy" that he thinks would not be the subject of political controversy, and therefore not covered by this bill.

For instance, despite claims made by a small but vocal conservative minority, there is no longer any debate that climate change exists and is directly caused by human actions. This is a settled scientific fact. To suggest otherwise is to knowingly lie and mislead the Ohio public.

There is, however, a robust debate over the range of climate change solutions, Earth System tipping points, competing climate models, and policy solutions, and universities are deeply enmeshed in these, both through individual faculty research as well as institutional climate change policies. Two notable ones include the American College and University Presidents'

Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), of which my own institution has been a signatory since 2010, and the more recent American Campuses Act on Climate (ACAC), which Denison University also signed in 2015. To date over 300 colleges are signatories to this latest effort, and such efforts have been critical to advancing low-carbon and net-zero carbon efforts across the US.

By singling out both "climate change" and "sustainability" as controversial beliefs or specified concepts, you are directly undermining university efforts to address climate change, arguably the single most important issue in the world today, and one which children not even born yet will still be dealing with next century. Such targeted language actually prevents our students from engaging in a "rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth" in relation to climate change. This is just one of many examples of how the politically biased language in this bill fails to achieve its stated goal. Instead, it attempts to legislate a conservative political biases into law as the "norm."

Finally, I want to briefly address the issue of the targeting of partnerships with China in Sec. 3345.591 (521-56). While completing my PhD I spent six years working for an academic research center called the India China Institute (ICI), which promoted research and educational exchanges between India, China, and the US. In this role I helped design joint courses with Indian and Chinese universities, coordinated visiting scholars from India and China coming to the US, and led field-based research and summer graduate courses in both countries.

These experiences were some of the most valuable and impactful educational moments of my life. They helped expose me to diverse cultural perspectives and ideas and helped to make clear how much of the anti-China rhetoric so common in the US today, and clearly evident in this bill, is based on ignorance of Chinese people and their rich history and culture.

To be clear, I have no love for the Chinese government. I am deeply critical of many of their policies, from the human rights abuses of Tibetans and Uyghurs to crackdowns on freedom movements in Hong Kong and the growing techno-surveillance state. But the Chinese people are not the same as the Chinese government. By banning any relationships with Chinese universities or research centers, this bill reinforces a xenophobic and anti-Asian politics. It also denies our students and faculty a wide range of valuable opportunities to learn from our colleagues in

China, including student study abroad opportunities and visiting Chinese faculty. None of these restrictions will impact US-Chinese security issues. They will harm global education in Ohio.

In closing, Senator Cirino argues SB 83 offers an "urgent course correction" that will "protect Ohio students" against diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) frameworks that promote "social engineering rather than true intellectual diversity of thought." He also argues that DEI programs "undermine the first amendment, will take us down the path of indoctrination of our students, and will rob them of the opportunity to learn and think for themselves" (Sponsor testimony). Yet he has provided no empirical evidence, only anecdotal fluff, to support such serious claims.

I'd like to close with a quote from Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, written almost 60 years ago to this day (April 16, 1963). This letter is included in the list of mandatory readings proposed for the new US history class in this bill, but ironically the spirit and language of Dr. King's famous letter would be prohibited by this bill because it relies on a "specified ideology" that divides people into the categories of "oppressed and oppressor."

*My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the **oppressor**; it must be demanded by the **oppressed** ... So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?*

I propose we should ask the same question of Senate Bill 83 supporters today. Which side are you on—the side seeking to preserve justice, or the side seeking to extend injustice?

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.