

MEMORANDUM

To: The Strategic Planning Committee of ASALH

From: The ASALH Florida Coalition

Subject: Report on the status of Florida's HB7: Responses and Recommendations

Date: August 7, 2022

Introduction:

On July 25, 2022, ASALH's Strategic Planning Committee ("the Committee") met to discuss the status of the ongoing controversy surrounding the passage of Florida's HB7, the so-called, "STOP WOKE" Act and similar bills passed in several other states. Representatives of the ASALH Florida Coalition ("the Coalition") were invited to attend. Following a discussion of the impact of HB7 on Florida's schools and students, particularly as it related to the teaching of Black History, the Committee requested a report from the Coalition on HB7, the actions taken to counter its impact and any recommendations for actions in the future.

Background:

The Coalition, for those who may not know, is an unofficial collaboration between the six ASALH Branches in Florida.¹ The Presidents and other officers of the Coalition have been meeting since 2016, sharing information on how to improve their operations, grow their membership and advance the Mission of ASALH. Exploring ways and means to support ASALH's annual meetings and conferences is a recurring agenda item for the Coalition.

The Covid Pandemic and the global protest prompted by the murder of George Floyd dominated everyone's attention. While maneuvering to operate our Branches, we engaged in the racial justice dialogues and demonstrations taking place in our communities. Simultaneously, we saw the emergence of a right-wing reaction or backlash to the so-called "racial reconciliation," led by Florida's Republican Governor and legislature. That backlash, like those which followed the Reconstruction era and the Civil Rights era, was grounded in white supremacist ideology and the myth of a post-racial America. Both Dr. Cha-Jua's article, "*SB 148 and the Assault on the Teaching of Black History*" and a Washington Post article on the same subject, provide excellent context for anyone needing a refresher on the roots of these regressive legislative actions.²

¹ The Coalition Branches include the James Weldon Johnson Branch (Jacksonville), the Tampa Branch, the St. Petersburg Branch, the Dorothy Turner Johnson Branch (Central Florida), the Manasota Branch (Sarasota and Bradenton), and the South Florida Branch.

² [SB 148 and the Assault on the Teaching of Black History; George Floyd's Murder Launched a Global Movement. It also Sparked a Global Backlash](#)

Governor DeSantis attacked the Biden administration's Covid policies (masking, social distancing and closures) while railing against "woke" liberals intent on indoctrinating children and emasculating parents. School boards became battlegrounds, with mask requirements and Critical Race Theory the primary targets. Seizing the opportunity created by conservative think tanks, Fox News and Trump's executive order,³ DeSantis pushed through HB7, making it illegal to teach children that they are racist or that they live in a racist nation, and giving parents a right to sue if they believe a teacher has violated the law.

Passage of HB7 poses an immediate threat to the teaching of Black History and to those who teach it. Since 1994, Florida has required the teaching of African and African American History, codified as FL. Statute 1003.43(h).⁴ The Statute and its accompanying standards have been amended to reflect HB7's limitations but retains the essential requirement to teach Black History. While we know the teaching of Black History was sporadic before HB7, we know it will likely be non-existent in the face of potential legal liability and or disciplinary action.

The Coalition Responses and Recommendations:

The Coalition, through its Branches, have taken a number of actions to contest the legitimacy of and necessity for HB7. Those are detailed hereafter.

1. Activism at school boards. It should be obvious to most observers that the anger and vitriol on display at school boards across the country is not accidental. Well organized and well funded groups like the Mom for Liberty, and white supremacist militia groups like the Proud Boys, did not just decide to begin attending school board meetings. In response, we have encouraged our members and allies from other organizations to attend school board meetings and to speak in support of school board members who support the teaching of our history. We have drafted short "white papers" which challenge the false narratives pushed by those who do not want Black history taught.⁵
2. Encourage members to join the African American History Task Force ("AAHTF"). The Florida Commission of Education created the AAHTF to support the teaching of Black History as required by FL. Statute 1003.42(h).⁶ County school boards in Florida can create an AAHTF to aid in complying with the Statute. Four of our six Branches' schools have been recognized as Exemplary in the teaching of African and African American history (Duval, Panellas, Hillsborough and Miami-Dade). Bradenton's school board unanimously voted to support its implementation plan to achieve Exemplary status at its' May, 2022 meeting.⁷
3. Write letters to the Editor. We encourage members to write to the local newspaper, expressing support for accurate teaching of our history and for those

³ [How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict Over Critical Race Theory](#)

⁴ [FL. Statute 1003.42. Required Instruction](#)

⁵ [African American History Brief](#)

⁶ Florida's African American History Task Force. [AAHTF](#)

⁷ [African American History Brief No. 6](#)

school boards who resist the restriction of that instruction or removal of African American content.⁸

4. Write letters to our Branch membership. In order to encourage member participation, we must ensure they are informed and energized.⁹ Former national ASALH President and former Manasota Branch President, Dr. James Stewart wrote this “Call to Action” to our members. We will use all available platforms, including newsletters, emails, webinars and the like, to engage our members.
5. Support candidates for the school board. While our Branches cannot endorse candidates for political office, we can individually support those candidates who support our Mission. School board elections in Florida are non-partisan by design but, in effect, they are as political as any other race for elected office. With due care and attention to protect our 501(c)(3) status, our individual members can be active in this arena.
6. Form coalitions with like-minded organizations. There are numerous groups, including not-for-profits, churches, Black Greek letter fraternities and sororities, who support our Mission and the teaching of accurate history, and who also oppose censorship and the agenda pushed by the right-wing. These groups and others will join with us in protecting the rights of all children to receive accurate and unvarnished history and instruction.
7. Consider forming freedom schools to provide after-school and weekend instructions. We have always found ways to educate ourselves and our families, whether in the woods, distanced from the plantation house, or in our churches and homes, when denied access to all white schools.
8. Libraries. Libraries have, throughout recorded history, been centers for learning and scholarship. Many libraries in traditionally African American communities have been central to the education of our children and adults, particularly in times like we face today, where the public schools have become mired in partisan political battles. As an example, the African American Cultural Resource Center, located in the Betty J. Johnson library in NewTown (Sarasota’s Black community) has recently hosted several programs designed to provide multimedia content to K-12 children on African American history and culture.

The right-wing Republican attack on the teaching of truthful history has, so far, been successful. The current Republican governor of Virginia rode his attack on CRT to victory last year. Great books have been banned and removed from classrooms and libraries. Teachers have been threatened, thousands have resigned and those who remain will avoid teaching our history for fear of retribution. This threat is real and must be challenged. We look to ASALH leadership for guidance and leadership in this fight.

⁸[Using MLK to Bash CRT by Robert Catineau; The Debate Over Critical Race Theory is Divisive - and Unnecessary by Dr. Caryl Sheffield](#)

⁹ [A Call to Action by Dr. James Stewart](#)