



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY

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The Association for the Study of African American Life and History Statement on Florida's Rejection of the AP African American Studies Course

February 2023

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) strongly condemns the actions of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) to deprive students of accurate knowledge about the African American experience. ASALH believes that DeSantis, the FDOE, and white supremacist forces in dozens of other states are attempting to censor Black historical knowledge in public school curricula. We also condemn the College Board's revisions which conform to the talking points DeSantis and white supremacists have argued since 2019.

Governor Ron DeSantis denounced, and the Florida Department of Education rejected an Advanced Placement (AP) course in African American Studies developed by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) in collaboration with the College Board. ASALH is compelled to condemn in the strongest terms this blatant reactionary attempt to continue depriving students of accurate knowledge about African American experiences.

ASALH was founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson and other Black scholars 108 years ago. ASALH was created to counter the United States "master narrative" which erases, diminishes, or misrepresents the experiences and perspectives of Black people. ASALH was founded to provide an accurate historical account of the lived experiences and thoughts of people of African descent. The Association's mission "is to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community."

Through ASALH, Woodson institutionalized research and teachings on the global Black experience. Since 1915, the Association has worked to popularize Black historical knowledge. In 1926, ASALH created a popular educational vehicle, which we know today as Black History Month and in 1937, developed what today is known as Black History Bulletin. The Bulletin presents curriculum and instruction for public school educators and Black community institutional leaders on teaching African American history and culture.

It is in the spirit of our founder, Dr. Carter Goodwin Woodson that we respond to Governor DeSantis and the FDOE's attempt to censor the subjects taught and the interpretative frameworks used to make sense of Black socio-historical experiences.

For more than two years, over 300 Black/Africana Studies faculty recruited by ASALH worked to develop the AP course rejected by the FDOE. In a rigorous process, they created a course in Black/Africana Studies, not a history course.

African American/Africana Studies is a discipline of study similar to history, psychology, or sociology. The initial AP course provided an historical synthesis of African American history and a transdisciplinary analysis of the various social groups that composed the U.S. Black community including women, LGBTQ persons, and Black immigrants' role in the economy, position in the polity, status in society, and representation in popular culture. In addition, it explored preferred concepts and interpretative theories such as intersectionality used by some Black scholars to explain the lived experiences of Black people across race, class, gender, generation, region, and sexuality.

During the 1980s and 90s, African Americans succeeded in passing legislation which mandated the teaching of modules on African American history in several state legislatures. Resistance to school curricula built on cultural diversity and the social realities of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality has accelerated and intensified. We are now in a struggle to preserve and expand those hard-won victories.

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Since the publication of the 1619 Project in August 2019, white supremacists have mounted a concerted and coordinated national campaign to abolish and/or restrict teaching about African Americans and other African descended people. Forty-two Republican-controlled state legislatures have passed and/or proposed legislation to restrict how race (and gender) are taught in K-12 public schools and in some cases colleges and universities.

In Florida, the response to the AP course plunged the country into a roiling cauldron of “white rage” and Black resistance. Even though Florida has one of the most racially and ethnically diverse student populations, its teaching corps does not approximate its students’ diversity. In 2018-19, FDOE reported that 22 and 34 percent of its students were Black or Latinx, respectively. However, only 14 and 16 percent of Florida’s teaching staff were of the same demographics.

In addition, to its scarce Black and Latinx teaching staff, under DeSantis, Florida assumed leadership of the campaign to curtail teaching about Black people in K-20 schooling. In Florida, currently out of 67 counties only 15 are complying with the state legislature’s mandate to incorporate Black history into the K-12 curriculum. DeSantis, the FDOE, and the state legislature enacted two pieces of legislation to that end.

SB 7 also known as the STOP W.O.K.E. (Wrongs Against Our Kids and Employees) Act and SB 148, “An act relating to individual freedom” were designed to limit the teaching of Black folk’s experiences to focus on acts of “patriotism”. These laws both use deceptive language to regulate instruction on race and gender. The STOP Woke act does not have anything to do with stopping “wrongs”. It has more to do with suppressing the teaching of African American history and culture. In addition, these are aimed to prevent the use of knowledge from the 1619 Project and Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Section 2 (b) of SB 148 claims that CRT “distorts” U.S. history. SB 7 censors critiques of U.S. racial policies and practices such as those that are expressed in the 1619 Project. It also encourages “employees, parents, and students” to sue educational institutions, agencies, and corporations that violate this law.

DeSantis and the FDOE alleged the AP course was full of historical inaccuracies; yet they did not identify one issue of fact. Rather, they opposed the inclusion of particular scholars and interpretative frameworks.

This attack is part of a politically motivated rightwing project led by the MAGA elements of the Republican Party to prevent teaching the truths presented in the 1619 Project and what fascists call Critical Race Theory (CRT). Both the 1619 Project and CRT, like most approaches to African American history and preferred theories in African American/Africana Studies, contend that racial oppression is constitutive, pervasive, and enduring in the United States’ economy, politics, law, and social institutions.

If we omit Black historical knowledge from public schooling, we are at risk of Black children continuing to manifest symptoms of self-hatred and white children continuing to express racial antipathy. Failure to educate youth and the general society on Black/Africana Studies and the study of other marginalized groups undermines their social and mental wellbeing and social harmony. Therefore, we fervently support the offering of the African American Studies AP course in Florida schools.

We understand the final curriculum released by the College Board was the product of an internal review process which was completed in December, 2022. However, DeSantis and the fascists’ opposition to critical interpretations of the U.S.’s past and present anti-Black policies and practices were well known prior to the FDOE’s rejection of the AP course in African American Studies. ASALH is gravely disappointed in the College Board’s apparent capitulation to the retrograde ideas of DeSantis and his minions.

By limiting discussions of the allegedly controversial subjects and scholars to optional projects, the College Board has effectively eliminated them from the course. The effort to excise theories such as “intersectionality” and to replace them with generic concepts misrepresents the core concepts and theories in the (trans)discipline.

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ASALH finds that censoring the content on contemporary conditions and liberatory movements problematic. We condemn the logic by which the African American reparations movement was presented as a contemporary movement thus rationalizing cutting information on it. Black peoples' demand and struggle for reparations predate the U.S. Constitution and has recurred in every generation.

ASALH believes the censoring of radical Black scholars of this, and previous generations falsifies African American history. This action undermines the College Board's credibility as a site for knowledge on the experiences of Black folk and the concepts and theories used to analyze their experiences.

ASALH believes it is possible to incorporate more accessible texts, such as speeches, by the excised scholars and through the same method make the inclusion of Black nationalists and radicals more robust by not confining them to specific historical moments.

We call upon the African American people and everyone who believes in academic freedom to join together to resist DeSantis and the FDOE's attempt to repress teaching on the Black experience. Additionally, we condemn the College Board's capitulation to this reactionary outlook.

In the spirit of our founder Dr. Carter G. Woodson and words of the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, "Let [our] motto be resistance! resistance! RESISTANCE!"

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