

AHA–OAH Statement on Executive Order “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling”

Advocacy, History Education

The American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) have released a joint statement on the presidential executive order [“Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling.”](#) The executive order “grossly mischaracterizes history education across the United States, alleging educational malpractice.” “The executive order’s narrow conception of patriotism and patriotic education does more than deny the actual history of American democracy; it also undermines its own goals of a rigorous education and merit-based society,” the statement reads. “We reject the premise that it is ‘anti-American’ or ‘subversive’ to learn the full history of the United States with its rich and dramatic contradictions, challenges, and conflicts alongside its achievements, innovations, and opportunities.”

To date, 30 organizations have signed on to the statement.

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The presidential executive order [“Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling,”](#) signed on January 29, 2025, grossly mischaracterizes history education across the United States, alleging educational malpractice—teachers supposedly “[i]mprinting anti-American, subversive, harmful, and false ideologies on our Nation’s children.” The order uses this caricature to justify sweeping and unprecedented federal interventions in public education.

This inflammatory rhetoric is not new. For the past four years, the same largely fabricated accusations have provided justification for efforts by some state legislatures to prohibit “divisive concepts” in history and social studies education, along with other extreme restrictions that the Organization of American Historians (OAH) and American Historical Association (AHA) have separately and jointly opposed.

Taken together, this state legislation and executive order not only disregard the training, ethics, and lifelong work of history teachers; they also demean American students by assuming that patriotism can be ignited only by triumphal stories and that our students are incapable of forming complex opinions about their nation’s past.

The sweeping claims of “radical indoctrination,” moreover, are almost entirely unmoored from the reality of history education in thousands of classrooms across the United States. The AHA recently published [American Lesson Plan](#), the most comprehensive study of secondary US history education undertaken in the 21st century. The AHA surveyed over 3,000 middle and high school US history educators, conducted hundreds of interviews, and analyzed thousands of pages of instructional materials from geographically diverse school districts of all shapes and sizes. The report delineates what is actually taught in secondary school history classes.

This careful research revealed a landscape of public education dramatically different from the “indoctrination” alleged in this executive order and “divisive concepts” state legislation. AHA researchers found dedicated history teachers, professionals who are primarily concerned with helping their students learn central elements of our nation’s history. Nearly 100 percent of the teachers surveyed rated “developing informed citizens for participation in a democratic society” as a goal for their history courses, and 94 percent identified this as an important or very important outcome. This examination of the lesson plans and materials they use in the classroom corroborates these findings. Developing critically informed citizens to participate in our democracy is the opposite of indoctrination.

This executive order, however, mandates ideological instruction and the politicization of history grounded in ahistorical thinking. The order draws upon the deeply flawed and roundly debunked 2021 report of the “President’s Advisory 1776 Commission”—a panel devoid of experts in the history of the United States—which [the OAH](#) characterized in 2020 as a partisan attempt to “restrict historical pedagogy, stifle deliberative discussion, and take us back to an earlier era characterized by a limited vision of the US past.”

The executive order’s narrow conception of patriotism and patriotic education does more than deny the actual history of American democracy; it also undermines its own goals of a rigorous education and merit-based society.

This is neither history nor patriotism. An uncomplicated celebration of American greatness flattens the past into a parade of platitudes devoid of the context, conflict, contingency, and change over time that are central to historical thinking. We instead support our nation’s educators as they help students learn how past generations fought to make the United States a “more perfect union,” in the words of our Constitution. As they teach the history of how people in the past chose to devote, risk, and in some cases even lose their lives challenging our nation’s most glaring imperfections, they teach our youth resilience, courage, and pride. They also teach them history.

We reject the premise that it is “anti-American” or “subversive” to learn the full history of the United States with its rich and dramatic contradictions, challenges, and conflicts alongside its achievements, innovations, and opportunities. History education that is rooted in professional expertise and integrity can inspire patriotism in American students through deep and honest engagement with our nation’s past and prepare them for informed civic engagement. Teachers want students to grapple with complex history. This history includes the rich legacy of freedom and democracy built into the nation’s foundation. It also includes legacies of contradictions to those principles present at the nation’s founding and beyond. It includes the struggles of Americans across nearly 250 years to enlarge that legacy—to end slavery, to end prejudice against immigrants from across the world, to end poverty, to build a nation where everyone has the freedom to pursue their dreams.

The AHA and the OAH advocate for the importance of history in American public life and for education that prepares our nation's students for informed citizenship and work. Like all histories, American history is complicated and fascinating; learning about our past should stimulate discussion and debate rooted in evidence and professional scholarship. For that to happen, we must let our teachers do what they do best: teach without interference or ideological tests. And let our students learn *how* to think, rather than *what* to think.

The following organizations have signed on to this statement:

African American Intellectual History Society
African Studies Association
American Association for State and Local History
American Association of University Professors
Association for Computers and the Humanities
Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies
Association of University Presses
Berkshire Conference of Women Historians
Conference on Asian History
Coordinating Council for Women in History
Florida Freedom to Read Project
Freedom to Read Project
Historians for Peace and Democracy
Immigration and Ethnic History Society
Labor and Working-Class History Association
LGBTQ+ History Association
Midwestern History Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council on Public History
Network of Concerned Historians
North American Conference on British Studies
New England Historical Association
New England History Teachers Association
The Reacting Consortium
Social Welfare History Group
Society for Historians of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era
Society for U.S. Intellectual History
Society of Architectural Historians
Western History Association