

Memory Laws or Gag Laws? Disinformation Meets Academic Freedom

Since spring 2021, Republican state legislators across the United States have introduced dozens of new laws targeting curricula related to race and racism. A number of states have already passed laws or established administrative requirements to restrict the teaching of American history, while others are set to follow suit. Under the pretext of suppressing “divisive topics,” several states have introduced Orwellian limitations on speech in the name of free speech. Some states, including Idaho and Florida, now specifically ban the teaching of critical race theory (CRT), and Texas forbids students from learning about the 1619 Project in public K–12 schools. School boards, university governing boards, and educators across the country have been drawn into these manufactured controversies, which appeal to fears that white students may feel distraught about the legacies of genocide, slavery, dispossession, and systemic racism in US history.

The deep transformations that occurred in the wake of the US civil rights movements of the 1960s were paralleled by an international academic revolution led by Stuart Hall and others at the Cultural Studies School in Birmingham, England; Paulo Freire’s foundational

publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Brazil; and many other approaches to colonialism and to the history of settlement and plantation societies in the Americas. Their critiques of racism and racial oppression present understandings of history that challenge the narratives that have advanced the interests of people of European descent since early colonial times. The thrust of this work in the last two generations contributed to a more inclusive and antiauthoritarian pedagogy attentive to social justice. Periodically, the political Right has reacted to these movements for social justice and inclusion with demands for censorship and curricular bans. It is now employing memory laws to restrict academic freedom and censor history.

Spurred by the recent upsurge in white ethnonationalism in the United States, conservative activists have attempted to reenergize white-settler narratives of the nation’s founding while vilifying histories that call attention to slavery, oppression, and dispossession. Their reactionary agenda utilizes many disinformation tactics, including the production and dissemination of a counterfeit version of critical race theory, and has resulted in numerous attacks on the academic freedom of educators.

For its next volume, scheduled for publication in fall 2022, the *Journal of Academic Freedom* seeks original articles that critically examine attempts at thought control by the Right, the whitewashing of historical narratives, and specific assaults on academic freedom that cut across the K–12 and higher education sectors, both in the United States and abroad. We will consider submissions on any topic related to academic freedom, but we are especially interested in the following topics:

- book and idea bans, legislative efforts, and other forms of censorship
- the 1619 Project, the 1776 Project, and the sabotaged hiring of Nikole Hannah-Jones
- doublespeak, academic free speech, and education about racial inequalities
- strategies for truthful pedagogies and content on racism, racial inequality, and oppression
- features of recent Republican “memory laws”
- attacks on Black history and CRT and ethnic and gender studies
- comparative approaches to memory laws, history, and academic freedom

Submissions are due by March 10, 2022. Please visit <https://www.aaup.org/about-JAF> to read our editorial policy and the complete call for papers.