



Statement on HB327 and Legislation that Restricts History Education

January 10, 2022

As Ohio's professional association of archivists, the Society of Ohio Archivists stand in firm opposition to Ohio HB327. As archivists we collect, preserve, and make accessible historic documents that allow people to study and learn from the past. We vehemently oppose any legislation that infringes upon free speech and interferes with the teaching and research work of not just archivists, but librarians, teachers, professors, and workplace educators.

By prohibiting "divisive concepts" in education, HB327 attempts to inhibit the archival profession and the day-to-day work of archivists. Archives, especially those housed in public colleges and universities, will be unable to collect and share material that fully reflects the experiences of all Ohio's people. As those charged with collecting and preserving the primary sources upon which historical narratives are based, it is vitally important that our collections document an accurate view of the past including those who have faced discrimination based on their race, sex, gender, ethnicity, or other characteristic. All Ohioans deserve to see themselves reflected in the historical record. The silences in the archives that HB327 creates will change the way current and future generations understand and learn from the past.

Another fundamental threat at the core of HB327 is that it will deny students the ability to develop critical thinking skills and a thorough understanding of historical facts. By barring "divisive concepts," students will not be able to develop cultural literacy or sensitivity. They will be denied the chance to consider and discuss multiple points of view, which will make them grossly unprepared to agree with or oppose ideas and evolving concepts, as well as an understanding of the ever-changing world around them. Ultimately, these students will be less engaged in learning. This can only hurt Ohio as these students become adults who need to be equipped to deal with controversies and be adept at analyzing material and applying critical thinking skills to draw conclusions.

In HB327, there is a lack of clarity around the historic documents permitted to be used in teaching and learning. This deserves attention, as this wording too will negatively affect the ability of archivists to do their work. Providing access to historical materials is a fundamental tenet of the archives profession. As written, HB 327 can be interpreted to disallow the inclusion of all historic documents except those explicitly named or permitted by statute. Paired with the requirement that history must be presented "objectively," this would mean that Ohio's students would lose the opportunity to learn about some important Ohioans and their work through archival collections and primary sources tied directly to them.

Affected topics include:

- Harriet Beecher Stowe and the abolition movement - Stowe's life and work, as well as the abolition movement and Ohio's role in the Underground Railroad would be unable to be taught



as pivotal in ending slavery. Without the ability to teach that in our state and country, people were owned as property, enslaved, or excluded from civic life “on the basis of race” as HB327 states, the concept of slavery will never be fully comprehended by those seeking to learn.

- Women’s Suffrage and Ohio’s significant role in the passage of the 19th Amendment would also be a topic prohibited by HB327. Just a year ago, we were in the midst of celebrating the centennial of that legislation. This governing body supported and passed HB 30 in 2019 which created the Ohio Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission to oversee the events, including educational programming about women’s suffrage. Today, however, this same body wishes to silence the truth that women were denied equal access to the ballot because of their sex.
- Native American history in Ohio would be a topic that would be restricted even more than it already is. Many communities across the state take pride in American Indian heritage - we have cities and rivers named after the tribes that were removed from the state. The language in HB327 further prohibits any discussion of the reasons for removal or where the descendants of those tribes thrive today.
- Ohioans feel great pride when discussing those who serve our country, and the 839,000 who served in WWII are part of that history. However, HB327 would prohibit the teaching of those who served and their role in liberating those who were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in concentration camps by the Nazis. In 2014, Ohio unveiled the Ohio Holocaust and Liberators Memorial to remember not just those who suffered in the concentration camps, but those soldiers who liberated thousands from certain death in those camps.

Ohio’s students, at every level, deserve to learn the history of their state, with a full picture of the many people and cultures who have contributed to it. HB327 threatens to censor facts and historical realities, deny students their voice and identity, and disempower educators. This attempt to homogenize and “whitewash” education is not helping to create accurate history, but rather to create a nostalgic view of the past. As archivists, we are called to provide access to the truth, no matter how ugly or violent. The feelings of discomfort associated with learning these truths are necessary. When students learn of the inequities of the past, they are in a better position to be motivated to take action to change things for the future.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work on behalf of the great state of Ohio.

Signed,

Council of the Society of Ohio Archivists