

Roundtable Series on the Worldwide Censorship of History Education

Relevance and Structure of the Events

On 12 January 2023, the Florida Department of Education rejected a draft Advanced Placement interdisciplinary course on African American Studies, because it discussed critical race theory and would serve as “a vehicle for a political agenda” and as “woke indoctrination.” The rejection included readings from historians, including Robin D. G. Kelley and Nell Irvin Painter, and sections including “the Movement for Black Lives,” “Black Struggle in the 21st Century,” and “the Reparations Movement.” The decision fitted a pattern of what PEN America called “educational gag orders”: state level bills introduced with the intent to restrict teaching and discussion of race, racism, gender and United States history in K-12 schools, higher education, and state agencies and institutions.

Three months later, in early April, the National Council for Educational Research and Training in India presented changes in history, political science and sociology textbooks for Classes 6 to 12. Among the topics affected were historical figures such as Mahmud Ghazni of Afghanistan (971–1030) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964); the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and Mughal Empire (1526–1857); Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination (1948) and the temporary ban of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh afterward; the Emergency (1975–1977); and the Gujarat riots (2002). It was the third large-scale textbook review since the Bharatiya Janata Party took charge in 2014 and fitted the broader Hindutva (Hindu-nationalist) campaign of the President Narendra Modi.

Both these developments signal a set of worrying global trends: the increasing censorship of historical teaching; the widening scope of censorial practices; and the cross-fertilization of censorial techniques between different state and non-state actors in (“backsliding”) democracies. Given these developments, we think it is of the greatest importance to bring together academics, high-school teachers and textbook publishers from four of the most effected countries – the United States, Brazil, Hungary and India – to talk about:

- The dangers of and methods with which history education is being censored;
- The importance of academic freedom and critical history education for resilient democracies and an engaged civil society;
- Ways to combat ongoing trends and to work in transnational cooperation.