

Stop the suppression of the San Francisco murals! Defend the right to history, art and culture!

The Socialist Equality Party, The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
14 August 2019

The suppression of the historic Depression era murals at George Washington High School in San Francisco painted by left-wing artist Victor Arnautoff is an attack on freedom of speech and artistic expression.

The censorship campaign against the 13-panel mural titled the “Life of Washington” is based on the brand of right-wing politics that promotes race and gender as the fundamental categories of American society in order to obscure the class exploitation that is the driving force of capitalism and the basic source of social inequality and poverty. At a time when working people all around the world are entering into struggle, the purveyors of identity politics, representing privileged sections of the middle class, aid the efforts of the ruling elites to divide the working class.

The targeting of these murals, which depict the oppression of slaves and Native Americans, as somehow “racist” is a particularly filthy exercise in elitism by those who use race and gender to carve out a bigger share of the wealth and power of the top 10 percent for themselves. It is an attack on culture, art and history, and the right of workers and young people to decide for themselves and learn from the artistic and scientific achievements of the past.

It is the latest in a series of attacks on artistic expression spearheaded by the identity politics zealots.

* Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmitt Till was suppressed because she is white and supposedly has no “right” to portray the racist murder of the 14-year-old African-American boy.

* John William Waterhouse’s *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896) was taken down for a week at the Manchester Art Gallery under the pretext of fighting misogyny, pedophilia and the “male gaze.”

* The name of Lillian Gish has been removed from a theatre at Bowling Green State University in Ohio simply because the great actress appeared in the racist film *Birth of a Nation*.

As actor Danny Glover, who attended George Washington High School, recently and correctly said, “To destroy [the murals] or block them from view would be akin to book burning.”

The claim that these murals cause “trauma” among those who view them is absurd. Students do not need self-appointed censors to tell them what they can and cannot see, hear and read!

Hundreds turned out last week to view the murals, despite the efforts of the school board to keep the viewing a virtual secret. This shows that there is broad opposition to the suppression of these priceless works, produced by a left-wing artist in the midst of the Depression and a growth of socialist and anti-capitalist sentiment.

Faced with public anger, the school district plans to amend its earlier decision to whitewash the murals and announce at a school board meeting Tuesday night a scheme to cover them up with panels instead.

We say: No deal! You cannot trifle with art, history or the working class! We demand: Hands off the murals!

The same forces that want to destroy the murals support the politicians of both parties who are destroying public education and reducing teachers to near-poverty-level wages. Teachers have struck in states across the country, including Northern California, over the past two years to defend public education, and that includes art and culture.

Some sections of the Democratic Party are now

calling for a ballot initiative on the fate of the murals. This is a diversion designed to deflate and demobilize popular anger and opposition to this censorship drive.

The way forward for the defense of art and culture!

Efforts to defend the murals and end the right-wing censorship campaign must be expanded to mobilize the broadest layer of students, teachers, workers, artists and young people.

This must be part of a broader struggle to unite the working class and youth, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference, in the US and internationally in defense of all democratic and social rights. This includes the demand to end Trump's fascist persecution of immigrants, free all those being held in his concentration camps, and establish the right of workers to live and work in the country of their choice.

Hundreds of billions must be appropriated to build new schools, reduce class size, pay teachers a decent wage and provide good quality public education for all. That includes the expansion of art and music classes and access to museums, theater and the concert hall for all working people.

The money is there in abundance to pay for this. It must be taken from the billionaire oligarchs who are plundering society to add to their mansions, yachts and private planes. This means the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact