

American Historical Association leadership vetoes members' resolution condemning genocide in Gaza

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On Thursday, January 16, the American Historical Association's (AHA) elected council struck down a resolution that condemned genocide and scholasticide in Gaza, with 11 board members voting to veto the resolution and four supporting it.

The veto of the resolution comes after it was approved by AHA members during the association's 138th annual meeting on January 4. During the meeting, a series of debates were held, with five speakers standing in favor of the resolution and five against. The resolution passed by an overwhelming margin, 428 to 88, and by the AHA's rules, would have to go to the elected council who could approve it, veto it, or decline to concur—in which case it would be put before the entire membership for a vote.

Justifying their veto, the AHA's elected council claimed that, while they deplore the violence and destruction in Gaza, the resolution:

lies outside the scope of the Association's mission and purpose, defined in its Constitution as "the promotion of historical studies through the encouragement of research, teaching, and publication; the collection and preservation of historical documents and artifacts; the dissemination of historical records and information; the broadening of historical knowledge among the general public; and the pursuit of kindred activities in the interest of history."

Those who supported the resolution have denounced

the decision by the AHA's elected council. One supporter, Rudi Batzell, professor of history at Lake Forest College, expressed outrage on X: "Shame on the AHA leadership for vetoing the scholasticide in Gaza resolution. Members voted overwhelmingly to support, and the resolution was written so narrowly and so carefully to meet exactly this kind of procedural objection. Craven."

Another supporter, Assal Rad, wrote on X that "the intentional destruction of education—and everything else—in Gaza is relevant to broadening knowledge. Academics will make careers out of writing about past atrocities while ignoring the ones happening in real time. Absolutely shameful."

One of those on the council who voted to veto the resolution was Anne Hyde, a history professor at the University of Oklahoma. Hyde explained that the resolution was vetoed "to protect the AHA's reputation as an unbiased historical actor." Justifying not allowing the membership as a whole to vote, Hyde claimed that such a ballot would not be "representative," adding lamely that people "don't agree about this issue."

Another opponent of the resolution was AHA executive director Jim Grossman. Grossman has a non-voting position on the council but nevertheless concurred with the veto. During the AHA's annual meeting earlier this month, Grossman denounced the resolution during his report to the meeting, claiming that the AHA is "not a political organization."

Supporters of the resolution, both before and after the veto, pointed out that the AHA has taken political stands before—namely, condemning the Bush administration's war in Iraq in 2007, and more recently adopting a resolution in 2022 denouncing the Russian

invasion of Ukraine, albeit from the standpoint of glorifying Ukrainian resistance and the Ukrainian government and whitewashing the Kiev regime's embrace of racist and antisemitic forces that trace their origins to Hitler's Ukrainian allies in World War II.

Responding to those who've pointed out the organization's past political stances, Grossman, speaking with *Inside Higher Ed*, claimed that "the Ukraine statement was purely historical. It was well within our scope." Grossman neglected to mention, however, that the same statement he refers to ended with: "We vigorously support the Ukrainian nation and its people in their resistance to Russian military aggression." Evidently, Grossman and the AHA leadership do not extend the same consideration to the Palestinian people in their resistance to Israeli military aggression.

In a similar comment regarding history, Hyde claimed that the war in Gaza "is not settled history, so we're not clear what happened or who to blame or when it began even, so it isn't something that a professional organization should be commenting on yet."

Yet history is a continuous and uninterrupted process in constant motion. Events and changes arise as a historical culmination of changing material conditions and unfold as a result of specific historical circumstances. Only by understanding the underlying history of an event can it be understood. The AHA's veto aims to block such an understanding of the Gaza genocide, which already ranks among the greatest crimes of modern history.

It was in fact through an understanding of the historical and political conditions of Palestine that members of the AHA voted 5 to 1 in support of a resolution condemning genocide and scholasticide in Gaza. That the AHA's council vetoed the resolution testifies to the complete lack of democracy within the organization when it comes to the vital interests of American imperialism—and in this key sense the AHA's veto of the Gaza genocide resolution and its support of the Ukraine resolution are consonant.

For over a year, the United States has sent billions of dollars in military equipment to Israel and denounced factual accusations that Israel is committing a genocide. The American ruling class has had to resort to labeling any opposition to the genocide as "antisemitic," as well

as falsifying or denying the history preceding the current conflict.

Meanwhile, for nearly three years Washington has shoveled billions of dollars in military armaments to Ukraine in a war whose aim is the dismemberment of Russia, no matter the cost in Ukrainian lives. A critical propaganda element of the US proxy war is its effort to cover up links between the far-right Ukrainian government and its forebears such as national hero Stepan Bandera, whose fascist movement cooperated with the Nazis and participated in the Holocaust.

The AHA leadership's anti-democratic maneuver against its own membership starkly reveals that when the interests of the American ruling class are at stake, "its" intellectual bodies can be called to heel with remarkable speed.



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