

# Rank-and-file historians oppose American Historical Association's censorship of opposition to Gaza genocide

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On February 8, the group Historians for Peace and Democracy (HPAD) began circulating an open letter that denounces the American Historical Association (AHA) Council's decision last month to reject a proposal for a resolution condemning Israel's genocide in Gaza.

During the AHA's 138th annual meeting, held in January, over 500 members participated in an initial vote on the resolution, voting 428 to 88 in favor. The measure specifically condemned the ongoing "scholasticide" in Gaza, i.e., Israel's systematic destruction of educational and cultural institutions and its killing of professors, teachers, and students.

As per the rules of the AHA, the resolution had to be sent for approval to the organization's executive council to ratify, reject, or bring before the entire membership. Rather than allowing rank-and-file historians the right to vote, the Council decided by an 11-4 margin to throw out the resolution. The blatantly antidemocratic decision was organized by executive director of the AHA, Professor James R. Grossman of the University of Chicago.

The executive council veto has been met with widespread anger among the membership of the AHA, the largest organization of professional historians in the world.

As of this writing, HPAD's open letter has garnered some 1,500 signatures from historians. Notable signatories include three former AHA presidents: Prof. Patrick Manning of the University of Pittsburgh; Prof. Kenneth Pomeranz of the University of Chicago; and Prof. Barbara Weinstein of New York University.

The letter from HPAD's Israel-Palestine Working Groups calls on the Council to rescind its veto and put

the resolution before the entire membership for a vote. The letter notes that the Council's decision reveals "a lack of trust in the judgment of its members" and a disregard for democracy within the AHA.

In seeking to rationalize its antidemocratic action, the AHA Council claims that a resolution denouncing genocide in Gaza "lies outside the scope of the association's mission and purpose," with Grossman implying such a measure would suggest that the body of historians is "a political organization."

In response, the HPAD notes that the AHA has taken political stances in the past. In 2022, the AHA's executive council itself passed a resolution (again, without a membership vote) condemning the invasion of Ukraine, albeit from the standpoint of glorifying Ukrainian resistance and repeating the patently anti-historical claim that the Russian invasion was an "unprovoked act of military aggression." The Putin government's invasion was reactionary, but it was anything but "unprovoked," as any serious historical analysis of the long NATO-Russia conflict following the dissolution of the Soviet Union would show.

As to the claim that condemning Israel's actions in Gaza has nothing to do with the work of historians, the HPAD letter points out that the resolution flows from the AHA's "responsibility to take public stands...[w]hen public or private authorities, in the United States or elsewhere, censor or seek to prevent the writing, publication, exhibition, teaching, or other practices of history or seek to punish historians."

Not only has Israel, aided and abetted by the US government and corporate media, actively falsified the history of the Middle East, denying the existence of the Palestinian people and the monstrous crimes of the

Zionist settlers perpetrated over many decades. And not only have Palestinian educators struggled to provide education and the teaching of history with the most minimal resources and the most difficult circumstances. Now, with its blitzkrieg against Gaza, Israel, acting again with the full backing of the US, has gone even further, physically annihilating educators and educational infrastructure of Gaza, barbarism that it is now extending to the West Bank.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has destroyed *all* of Gaza's universities, killed 161 professors and more than 903 students, injured 1,297 professors and 1,805 students, and wiped out archives, libraries, and historical sites. In the West Bank it has killed at least 36 university students and injured more than 141.

In an article by the WSWS on the Council's veto, we wrote that "[t]he AHA's veto aims to block...an understanding of the Gaza genocide, which already ranks among the greatest crimes of modern history."

Beginning with the Biden administration, and continuing further under the Trump administration, anyone who has spoken out against the genocide in Gaza has been subject to smear campaigns and accusations of antisemitism. Now the Trump administration promises to escalate the genocide, stating that "we're gonna take [Gaza]" and turn it into a real estate venture, while laying the groundwork to deport foreign students who protest the genocide on US campuses.

HPAD's statement concludes by stating that "[i]n a context of rising authoritarianism, many major US institutions are engaging in anticipatory obedience, much of which is geared to suppressing Palestine solidarity and criticism of the US and Israel." What is involved, the letter states, is "an assault on truth."

Under these circumstances, the AHA's executive council has shamefully acted to preemptively quash popular opposition to the genocide among its members.



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