



### **NWSA Statement About the Anti-Woke Agenda and Legislative Actions**

Like many of you, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) has been watching with increased alarm, anger, and frustration, the legislative efforts by the Republican party to limit our academic freedom, censor the teaching of African American, gender and queer studies, and place us in an untenable situation where we are unable to adequately defend ourselves and our livelihood. The attack is personal. It is rooted in anti-Black racism, patriarchy, transphobia, whiteness, and xenophobia, and it is a propagandistic argument designed to whitewash our collective history. We are clearly under attack.

As of yesterday, with the news that North Carolina's Republican-controlled House revisited a previously vetoed proposal and voted to restrict how K-12th grade teachers can discuss racial topics within their classrooms, there are now 28 states that have either limited how teachers can discuss issues about race and gender or are currently considering passing legislation. Florida's HB 999 specifically bans "the use of pedagogical methodology associated with Critical Theory, including, but not limited to, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Race Studies, Critical Ethnic Studies, Radical Feminist Theory, Radical Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Critical Social Justice or Intersectionality," and as such, it provides states with the model that they need to go forward. We have also noticed that some of these bills are so vague and wide-reaching that they are laying the foundation for future legislative attacks against any academic work, person, or group that critiques the U.S. and supports racial justice and gender equality. It will not stop unless we stop it. The attacks against critical race theory and intersectionality, coupled with the intentional campaign to reframe the term "wokeness" as a veiled slur against Black, Brown, and other marginalized people, are reminders that in this country, as bell hooks taught us, the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.

As educators and activists, we understand why this is happening and why it is vital to raise our collective voices to speak into this moment. It is not simply a debate about curriculum; it is a fight about the direction of this country. It is also important to note that this is not a new fight; it did not start with Ron DeSantis's "Don't Say Gay" bill or his anti-Woke Campaign; it did not start with Donald Trump's memo labeling CRT as "divisive" while issuing an executive order banning racial justice training; it did not even start with the groundbreaking work of the 1619 Project. This is an old battle that has its roots in the anti-literacy laws that were passed in Confederate states from 1740-1834. It has its roots in the *Roberts v. City of Boston* case, in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and in *Roe v. Wade*, to name just a few. It has its roots in anti-LGBTQ discrimination. It has its roots in white supremacy and the pursuit of manifest white destiny.

NWSA is the nation's largest network of feminist scholars, educators, and activists. One of our primary objectives is to promote and support the production and dissemination of knowledge about

women and gender through teaching, learning, research, and service in academic and other settings. We actively draw on feminist scholarship and stand squarely in support of intersectionality as a guiding methodology. We are more than just an academic association. We are activists. We are freedom fighters. We are feminists. We are scholars. We understand that there are times when we must speak up because our silence will never protect us, and if we are not careful, our silence will always appear to be a sign of silent approval. We have never chosen and will never choose to stand with oppressors. We will never request the master's tools to dismantle his house; instead, we will shape and craft our own tools to burn it down so that something better can be created. We will never eat their crumbs just because they have tried to convince us that we are hungry. We will continue to stand on the side of justice and against those seeking—either because of their fear or their need to control and silence us—to tear down the racial, social, and gender justice work that has been done in this country.

### **What Comes Next**

As statements have been released across the country, NWSA has carefully reviewed each one and elected to sign on to a few that align with our politics. One [statement](#), co-written by former National President Beverly Guy Sheftall, includes a call to participate in the [Freedom to Learn](#) National Day of Action on May 3. We are currently working to organize a Teach-In at 12p EST on May 3 (given that NWSA is based in Baltimore, we are organizing on the ground with scholars in the area). We are writing a lesson plan and will make it available to all our members. We are asking you to join us at 12p EST and host a Pop-Up Teach-In on your campus –this way; we will all teach the same thing on the same day at the same time. We are also thinking about what else we can do to participate at this moment actively. If you are interested in joining us or are planning an activity you would like to share, please add it to our google document.

Some of the ideas for the National Day of Action that were shared by Freedom to Learn include the following:

- Coordinate on as many campuses as possible any form of collective action (e.g, teach-in, rally, banned book reading, march).
- Coordinate activities in as many state capitols as possible (Florida, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, etc.) where anti-CRT and DEI laws, book banning, anti-trans legislation, voter suppression, abortion elimination laws, rejection of the AP African American Studies courses have passed or are being proposed.
- Coordinate activities in as many public places as possible, organized by grassroots organizers domestically or internationally. We might also identify regional offices of the College Board as a fitting location for protest.

Please let us know what you are planning to do and what you need from us at this moment. We stand ready to fight with you, until it is done.

A luta continua, vitória é certa

The National Women's Studies Association

Karsonya Wise Whitehead, President

Ariella Rotramel, Vice-President

Karma Chavez, Treasurer

Erica Williams, Secretary

Jessica N. Pabón-Colón, Member-At-Large

Beverly Guy Sheftall, Past President

Yi-Chun Tricia Lin 林怡君, Past President

\*And on behalf of those who are speaking out across the country and finding ways to resist and push back!

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