



SGA Statement on the Protect Students First Act

May 19, 2022

Atlanta, GA -- The Board of the Society of Georgia Archivists, representing the professional archivists of the State of Georgia, opposes the passage of the [Protect Students First Act](#) signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp on April 28, 2022. The law prohibits the teaching of what it terms “divisive concepts” pertaining to race and racism in public kindergarten through 12th grade classrooms. These “divisive concepts” include but are not limited to:

- “One race is inherently superior to another race;”
- “The United States of America is fundamentally racist;”
- “An individual, by virtue of his or her race, is inherently or consciously racist or oppressive toward individuals of other races;”
- and “Any other form of race scapegoating or race stereotyping.”

While the act goes on to state that it does not “Prohibit the discussion of divisive concepts, as part of a larger course of instruction,” or “Prohibit the use of curricula that addresses the topics of slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, or racial discrimination,” the effect of the law is to place limitations on educators regarding their approach to the teaching of these topics. The law entitles parents to a formal complaint process with the possibility of disciplinary action for educators or loss of funding for schools found to be in violation of the law.

Of the proposed bill, the [American Historical Association](#) wrote that it “would create a climate of fear for students in which trusted teachers could be subject to legal reprisals or highly valued community schools could suffer damaging penalties for teaching a full and accurate account of the past.” The [Georgia Association of Educators](#) expressed concern that the bill would stifle educators, stating that they would “aggressively fight attempts to criminalize the actions of educators who are following State Board of Education guidelines in teaching an unvarnished, honest, and truthful history of our country and the world around us, unattached to current political winds.” The [Georgia Library Media Association](#) called the bill a direct attack on the freedoms of Georgians, noting its impact on equitable access to information and learning for students.

The [Georgia Department of Education's Standards of Excellence for Social Studies for Kindergarten - Grade 12](#) states that the information-processing skill of identifying and using primary sources is introduced in the 1st grade and is continuously developed, mastered, and applied throughout the elementary, middle, and high school grades. The Standards of Excellence also includes many historical understandings relating to race, such as:

- The impact of European exploration and settlement on Native Americans in Georgia, including the Indian Removal Act
- Slavery and the Civil War in Georgia
- The impact of Reconstruction on Georgia, including the removal of African American legislators from power, the institution of sharecropping and the establishment of Jim Crow laws
- The role of Georgia in the Civil Rights movement

The use of primary source documents to teach any of these topics would illustrate historical injustices to people of color, including how and by whom these injustices were perpetrated. If such documents are deemed by this law as introducing or perpetuating divisive concepts, we are concerned that archival materials could be limited or excluded from K-12 classroom usage. Maintaining and expanding access and usage opportunities for users and potential users of archival records is a core value of our profession, and we oppose any prohibitions that would limit access and utilization of our records by teachers or students. Moreover, archival documents are crucial to academic inquiry and learning precisely because they present an unedited, unfiltered glimpse into our past. They demonstrate events, practices, and views connected to a specific time, place, community and/or person. As a result, they also illustrate and require the confrontation of historic iniquities. This confrontation and any associated discomfort on the part of students is necessary to understand the historical concepts involved. To potentially deny access to these records would be to deny access to the truth of history, and to deny the opportunity for students to see their own voice and identity represented in the historical record.

The Board of the Society of Georgia Archivists stands with our educator, historian, and librarian colleagues in opposition to the limits on academic freedom and access to historical truths imposed by this law.