

For immediate release:

People for Black History Statement
UT Martin, March 13, 2023

Contact: David Barber, Faculty Adviser, People for Black History

UTM Faculty Senate Leadership Attempts to Dodge Demand that it Condemn White Supremacist ‘Education’ Laws.

Over the last six weeks **People for Black History** has amassed over 1200 signatures on a petition demanding that our UT Martin Faculty Senate condemn “White Supremacist ‘Education’ Legislation.” The laws we are protesting make it illegal to teach concepts like systemic racism or white privilege in K-12 schools and illegal for public institutions of higher education to require that students take classes in which such concepts are taught.

Unfortunately, our UT Martin Faculty Senate leadership has decided that it will not allow our resolution to appear before the full Faculty Senate meeting on Tuesday, March 14.

People for Black History petitioners have not been shy about using the term “White Supremacist” when we explain our petition to people, and at least 1200 people on campus were, evidently, not shy about signing a petition condemning white supremacist legislation.

On the other hand, when we raised our resolution in front of the Faculty Senate Committee on Instruction (COI), our Faculty Senators’ major concern was the harshness of the term, “white supremacy.” Our COI Faculty Senators fear that if the Faculty Senate labels these laws “white supremacist,” Tennessee’s legislature and governor will cut funding for UTM. Not one of the COI Faculty Senators disputed the fact that, in actively seeking to suppress the teaching of racism’s centrality to American History, these laws objectively *are* white supremacist laws. Our COI Faculty Senators simply fear the consequences of calling white supremacist legislation by its rightful name. This is shameful, and it is a betrayal of UTM’s mission statement – to “educate and engage responsible citizens”.

Faculty Senate leaders, having channeled our resolution into the Committee on Instruction which tabled the resolution, then moved to prevent **People for Black History** from having any other access to placing our resolution on the Faculty Senate agenda.

As our Faculty Senate leadership did back in November of 2020, when they prevented a **Black History Matters Coalition** resolution advocating a General Education requirement for the study of African American History and Culture from reaching the full Faculty Senate (tabled at the time and remains tabled almost two years later), so today our Faculty Senate leadership seeks to prevent **People for Black History’s** resolution denouncing Tennessee’s white supremacist “education” laws from reaching the full Faculty Senate.

To place our resolution condemning Tennessee’s white supremacist education laws in front of the entire Faculty Senate is to force the Faculty Senate to commit itself, one way or the other, to

a definite position – either the Faculty Senate condemns the legislation and faces the anger of Tennessee’s political leaders (and the subsequent need to continue to expose and fight white supremacy in the State); or, the Faculty Senate rejects our resolution and openly sides with white supremacy. Our Faculty Senate leadership thinks that by preventing the **People for Black History** resolution from reaching the Faculty Senate floor, they can avoid the unpleasantness of both positions. But, of course, this is wrong.

In denying a Faculty Senate hearing to the **People for Black History** resolution, and a voice to the over 1200 people who signed our petitions, our Faculty Senate leadership **is** taking a position. Our Faculty Senate leadership is **defending** Tennessee’s white supremacist “education” laws; it is allowing these white supremacist laws to continue, unhindered and unquestioned, keeping Tennessee’s students ignorant of the real history of this country; it is continuing to pose before the K-12 teachers in Tennessee – many of them UT Martin graduates – the moral and financial dilemma of teaching the truth or lying about this history in order to save their jobs; it is opening the door to still more white supremacist “education” legislation – the kinds of legislation Ron DeSantis is currently attempting to roll out in Florida; and, finally, it is preventing the day when UT Martin, and all the state’s institutions of higher education, can require that students learn the real history of this country, Black History.