

March 3, 2023

Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee,

I write this letter in support of the proposed Holocaust & Genocide Education Mandate. I am an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, where I teach courses on topics like the history of Human Rights, the Holocaust, National-Socialism and global Genocide history. I write this letter as an educator, a scholar and also as the granddaughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors who cares deeply about Holocaust memory and Genocide education broadly.

The term Genocide was coined by Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish jurist, authored the book as a refugee fleeing Nazi atrocities. The purpose of this book was to alert the international community to the brutalities enacted by the Nazis and their collaborators and to lay the grounds for a legal framework to address these crimes.

In this work, Lemkin defines Genocide as a war waged against the existence of a group (national, racial, ethnic, religious or other). In this multifaceted and complex process, the existence of the group is attacked in a variety of manners that affect all life spheres, including social, economic, religious, cultural and physical. Genocide, in Lemkin's words, is "a composite of different acts of persecution or destruction." (*Axis Rule*, 92)

This holistic understanding of the concept of Genocide compels us to adopt a Genocide education program that adequately addresses this brutal crime in all its forms. It compels us to consider the ways in which groups have been targeted by systematic genocidal policies even if these policies did not involve explicit physical extermination, as was the case in some historical examples of Genocide. And it compels us to consider how population groups that have been marginalized in Genocide education, like Black Americans, experienced genocidal violence and fought against it.

The enslavement of Black Africans constitutes a prime example of Genocide in that it inherently sought the destruction of Black communities as groups while sustaining their physical existence as individuals to be exploited as commodities. Even after Emancipation, Black Americans were subjected to multiple forms of genocidal violations. Lemkin's 1944 formulation of Genocide explicitly names several policies that have fundamentally shaped the lives of Black people in the United States, including systematic economic deprivations, prohibition of cultural and spiritual traditions, removal of children from families, racial discrimination in resource distribution, prevention of healthcare and others.

The historical experience of Black Americans with Genocide is not limited to victimization. It is also one of resistance and resilience. From the moment that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide became international law in 1951, Black Americans have studied the meaning and content of this international legislation and explored ways of harnessing the Convention in their struggle against oppression and systematic racism. Black activism for Genocide recognition poses one of the most important case studies of citizens embracing international human rights laws and standards for advocacy.

By addressing examples such as the experience of Black Americans, the proposed Holocaust & Genocide Education Mandate will foster an understanding of Genocide as a complex set of processes that are interconnected rather than isolated moments on a timeline of atrocities. It will allow students in Minnesota to learn not only about the outcomes of genocidal violence but also about the global activism to prevent it.

I hope that the Committee will approve the Holocaust & Genocide Education Mandate and provide students in our state the opportunity to significantly enhance their knowledge and understanding of Genocide and its impact on our society.

Sincerely,
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