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American Historical Association condemns Gaza genocide



American Historical Association Annual Meeting, January, 2025 [Photo: Christy Thornton]

The American Historical Association (AHA), a leading body of historians in the US, passed a resolution on Sunday, January 4 titled “Resolution to Oppose Scholasticide in Gaza.” The resolution was passed during the association’s 138th annual meeting in New York City.

The motion, initially proposed in November, passed by a vote of 428 to 88. It now goes to the AHA’s elected council, which must approve it, veto it, or decline a concurrence, which would mean putting the resolution to a vote before the entire membership of 11,000.

The resolution accuses Israel of committing scholasticide—the intentional mass destruction of education—aided and abetted by the United States. It begins by explaining that “the US government has underwritten the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) campaign in Gaza with over \$12.5 billion in military aid between October 2023 and June 2024... that campaign, beyond causing massive death and injury to Palestinian civilians and the collapse of basic life structures, has effectively obliterated Gaza’s education system.”

It goes on to quote figures cited by United Nations experts in April, who began to document the systematic destruction of schools, universities and institutes of learning in Gaza, noting that 261 teachers and 95 university professors are among the 100,000-plus victims of the Gaza genocide, though the number of educators killed is likely far higher than UN estimates. The resolution justifies its charge of scholasticide by noting that since October of 2023, Israeli military forces have destroyed 80 percent of schools in Gaza and left over 625,000 children without access to education. It points out that the Israeli military has destroyed all 12 of Gaza's universities; most of Gaza's archives, libraries, cultural centers, museums, and bookstores; 195 heritage sites, 227 mosques, and three churches; and forcefully and violently displaced Gaza's population, depriving it of any access to education.

The AHA ended its resolution by stating that "the AHA calls for a permanent ceasefire to halt the scholasticide," adding that the AHA should "form a committee to assist in rebuilding Gaza's educational infrastructure."

Prior to voting on the resolution, a debate was held that allowed five people to speak in favor and five to speak against. Throughout the debate, the hotel ballroom where the meeting took place was filled to maximum capacity.

Speaking in support of the resolution, Sherene Seikaly, an associate professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, pointed out that "history is screaming to the present... the AHA has been deafeningly silent. Silence is complicity."

Seikaly worked alongside the group Historians for Peace and Democracy in drafting and promoting the resolution. Speaking to *Democracy Now!*, Seikaly explained it was not just Israel that was covering up genocide, but "this is also happening in mainstream media, in the courts, as well as in our universities... [the truth] can no longer hide under the rubble."

Another supporter of the resolution is Barbara Weinstein, a history professor at New York University and former president of the AHA. Speaking to *Democracy Now!*, Weinstein noted the shift that had been occurring in the AHA, which has often been reluctant to make openly political statements. She said:

Over the years it has become increasingly clear that we can't have a narrow definition of what our roles are as historians, and there's been more and more of a willingness to take a position on issues that relate directly to our roles as historians, as educators, as researchers, as archivists. And so, this is really a significant indication of the organization's willingness to think about its role more capaciously.

Opponents of the resolution argued that the AHA is not a political organization and asserted that passing such a resolution added fuel for attacks on academia.

Natalia Petrzela, professor of history at The New School, stated that “passing this resolution as the view of the AHA stands to hurt the historical profession and academia writ large... attacks [on academia] will only intensify with the coming [Trump] administration.”

Petrzela also stated that the resolution condemning genocide in Gaza constitutes “a pretty far left-wing view of the Israel-Hamas war.”

Among those who opposed the resolution were Suzanne Marchand, the AHA’s president-elect, as well as Jim Grossman, AHA executive director, who said that “as a membership organization, we keep our distance from issues that are controversial within and among our members.” It should be noted, however, that Grossman used his office to back the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project, which falsified American history in line with the racist politics of the Democratic Party.

The resolution passed by the AHA is not the first of its kind for the organization. In February 2022, the AHA passed a resolution denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, all but declaring its support for the US/NATO-backed proxy war that has ensued, killing hundreds of thousands. The resolution stated that historians “vigorously support the Ukrainian nation and its people in their resistance to Russian military aggression.”

There is a fundamental difference between the struggle of the Palestinians, arguably the most oppressed people on the planet after decades of Israeli annexations and occupation, and the war waged by the imperialist-backed Ukrainian government, overrun with neo-Nazis and fascists, which Washington aims to use to subjugate Russia no matter the cost in Ukrainian lives. A lack of historical perspective has all but erased the fundamental causes of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, including NATO’s steady eastward march to Russia’s border since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and covered up the direct links between the far-right Kiev regime and its forbears such as Stepan Bandera, whose fascist movement cooperated with the Nazis in the wholesale slaughter of Ukraine’s Jews.

This does not justify the reactionary invasion carried out by the regime of Vladimir Putin, which represents the pro-capitalist forces that emerged from within the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy to dissolve the Soviet Union and seize its nationalized property. It does, however, place the US/NATO proxy war against Russia within its proper historical and political context and exposes the false claim that the Russian invasion was entirely unprovoked.

The statement by the AHA on Gaza is a welcome stance. Since the resolution passed, the mainstream media has either not acknowledged it or denounced it. A January 9 [opinion piece](#) in the *New York Times* criticized the resolution, repeating the well-worn and false claim

that Hamas shelters fighters in schools, thereby justifying the schools' destruction, along with the students and teachers inside. A similar article was published in *The Times of Israel*.

Members of another prominent academic organization, the Modern Language Association (MLA), pushed through a resolution in November similarly accusing Israel of scholasticide. MLA leaders, however, have tried to prevent the resolution from going to a membership vote. The Israeli war in Gaza and its genocide of Palestinians are deeply unpopular with the public. Since October 2023, millions of people throughout the world have expressed outrage and horror at the genocide carried out by Israel with American backing. The American ruling class's support for genocide in Palestine is part of its broader agenda in the Middle East, which includes war and regime-change against Iran, itself part of a global war for US imperialist hegemony directed against Russia and China.

To prosecute war and militarism, the imperialist powers have sought to attack the democratic rights of the population. This is all too clear in academia, where scores of students and faculty have been expelled, fired, or sanctioned for expressing outrage at the genocide in Gaza. Examples of such attacks include the firing of Muhlenberg College Professor Maura Finkelstein and the denunciation of University of Pennsylvania lecturer Dwayne Booth.

The fact that two major academic organizations have drafted or passed resolutions condemning genocide and scholasticide in Gaza is significant. This occurs in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election victory of Donald Trump. Since his victory, the Biden administration has stepped up aggression against Russia, Syria, Iran and China. Trump promises a further massive escalation of aggression abroad, as he has made clear in recent statements.

Fifteen months of protests and futile appeals to capitalist politicians and governments to stop the Gaza genocide reveal that a new course is required. To oppose war and defend democratic rights, it is not enough to simply express outrage. Opposition to these crimes must be based on a social force that has both the power and the objective need to stop the bloodshed. That social force is the international working class.