Interventions

The Politics of French History in Times of Crisis

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Introduction

When former Western Society for French History President Andrew Ross approached me in the summer of 2023 with the idea of putting together a virtual event to discuss the perils and possibilities of being a French historian in a time when higher education is under attack, I was immediately enthusiastic about this prospect. I have spent my academic career at a small liberal arts college in the rural South, one that retains deep ties to the memory of Robert E. Lee, and as head of its Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program, I am all too familiar with debates over what should be taught and who belongs on campus. In the past few years, however, the culture wars over higher education have escalated. We've seen attacks on the teaching of race, gender and sexuality; the dismantling of affirmative action; opposition to DEI offices; and crackdowns on campus protests over Israel's occupation of Gaza. Gathering over Zoom in Fall 2023 provided us with an opportunity to think about how we can respond to the challenges of working in institutions that can seem increasingly hostile to their core mission of expanding students' worldviews.

Taken together, Jacqueline Couti, Corinne Gressang, Terrence Peterson, and K Ringelberg show that the culture wars have worked hand-in-hand with decreased funding and the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic to make our profession and our time in the classroom more fraught than they were just a few years ago. Some of our colleagues are operating with minimal resources and under conditions of state surveillance; these challenges are right now most acute in states like Florida and Texas, but the political hostility towards higher education is coming for us all. Because we have little power to affect these ill-winds, we are left with only "tactics [which] are the tools of the weak," in Terry's words (paraphrasing Michel de Certeau). These include making alliances across and outside the university, unionization, highlighting the agency of the marginalized in our classes, and leaving a job that has become intolerable. They also reveal that teaching French history can be a vital way to explore questions about power and difference, as professors and students may feel more able to discuss these issues than they would in a

class on the United States. Lastly, this panel helps us understand that even in the face of opposition to the work that we do, we haven't lost our power to connect with students, inspire them, and help them understand the world they live in.

- SARAH HOROWITZ

Where do you work? Where have you worked in the past?

JC: I work at Rice University, a private institution in a politically challenging climate. Some might view Texas as a case study or experiment in the issues facing democracy—I try not to think of Texas as the place where democracy goes to die; I strive to remain optimistic, but it is difficult at times. Texas has so much to offer, and yet since my arrival in 2018, the Texas legislature has attacked abortion and reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and, of course, the right to teach critical race theory and the history of slavery. Colleagues in public universities in Texas have been under renewed pressure lately. So far, Rice has been a "haven," all things considered. But for how long…? Before Rice, I taught at the University of Kentucky, Lexington from 2010-2018. Matt Bevin was the 62nd governor of Kentucky from 2015 to 2019, and the third Republican elected since World War I. I remember attending a gala promoting leadership in 2016 where Bevin said teaching French was just a waste of time. He added that he refused to give taxpayer money to the University of Kentucky to promote French majors. For him, Engineering majors were more useful. Everyone stood up and clapped at the end of his speech. I remained seated. One of my colleagues, Jeff Peters, was so dismayed after Bevin's speech was featured in the news that he wrote to Lexington's main newspaper. *Inside Higher Ed* did a story on this Clash of the Titans—or battle between David and Goliath, depending on your point of view.

KR: I work at a private university in North Carolina with roughly 7500 students at all levels, including some PhD and MA programs, and roughly 500 full-time faculty. Despite neoliberal DEI messaging and recruiting efforts, we remain persistently white, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, and middle to upper class. About halfway through my 20 years here, the administration talked me into being the campus's first ever LGBTQIA Coordinator, a role that came without course releases or stipends but required me to work across the entire campus, and without connection to an existing academic structure. Immediately of course we hit Amendment One and HB2, the state working to make being gay, lesbian, trans, and/or gender non-conforming even more illegal, and on my campus we had a particularly fraught Chick-fil-A situation as well. All these things are the same or worse today, but they were pretty dramatic then, and I had to learn fast.

TP: I teach at Florida International University in Miami. One way to approach the situation here is to consider different pieces of state legislation and the 30+ bills that have

had an impact on higher education. We are still working through the implications/implementation of these things. Some salient examples include:
HB 233 (2021): Whereby students can record professors for legal complaints
HB 7 (2022): "Stop Woke Act," prohibiting the teachings of a range of topics (currently under an injunction)
SB 7044 (2022): Post-tenure Review
SB 266 (2023): Prohibiting spending on DEI programs; blocking teaching "systematic racism" in required courses. This legislation originally sought to ban majors like Gender and Women's Studies.
HB 931 (2023): A ban on DEI in hiring
New State requirements: Core Courses must include "Western Canon" or "Documents from Founding Fathers where applicable"
It seems like every week we have a new restriction or rule to deal with. In addition, there are things like the denials at New College, the political appointment of university presidents, the funding of ideological centers meant to compete in course offerings (Hamilton Center at UF; Adam Smith Center for Economic Liberty at FIU), increased surveillance of course materials and syllabi. In sum, it's a climate of near complete insecurity and administrators have often washed their hands of advocacy; they are focused on implementation.

CG: I defended my dissertation in April 2020, which might have been one of the worst years ever to be on the job market. I was fortunate, or should I say lucky, and in January of 2020 I accepted a 4-4 load Tenure-Track position at Erksine College, a small Liberal Arts institution in rural South Carolina. I had no idea how dire the job market would become when I accepted the job; I was just thrilled I would not be unemployed when I graduated. There were certainly some concerns heading into this position, including the fact that the school was in the rural south, had some financial issues with its accreditors, and that it was Christian-affiliated. At the time that I was hired, the school required a broad statement of faith, with which I had no issue. The school had a long tradition of hiring retired pastors as presidents who had little experience with higher education and often made choices that did not help Erskine's financial situation. After my first year, our president retired. The Board of Governors finally hired someone who had college experience, and he began making sweeping changes. He rarely listened to faculty input and seemed particularly hostile to input from women. He took advantage of the Board's having placed Erskine in "financial exigency" nine years ago to circumvent faculty committees and make sweeping curriculum changes. I approached him once with a concern about the unequal pay of female faculty members. I collected data and presented evidence of discriminatory pay. He listened and then just said, "Anything else?" in a clear tone of dismissal. Perhaps the most important aspect of working day-to-day on this campus was underlined by the low pay. My starting salary, after negotiation, was $45,000. In my entire three years there, I did not get a single raise or cost of living adjustment. In

my first (and only) annual review with our Provost, I asked if/when I got tenure or promoted, that came with a raise and he said, "we hope so." This was a rather discouraging thing to say to a first-year faculty member. While there, the administration cut our library budget by hundreds of thousands of dollars, which meant that not a single book purchase request was completed since I arrived and for a brief period, we lost our JSTOR subscription. So, for the classes I taught, it was very difficult to assign research since the only resources available were more than 20 years old and with little relation to the subjects I taught. Lastly, all 35 faculty across the college had to split a "professional development" budget of $4,000, for the whole college for conference travel in my first year. Later our accreditors mandated faculty be allotted a larger budget for travel (that we were contractually required to do for tenure). Together these factors meant a very difficult, sometimes exhausting work environment.

What impact does your context have for teaching History and/or French and Francophone topics? How can historians of France and the Francophone world respond to efforts to restrict academic freedom?

JC: As a French and Francophone Studies professor examining sexuality and power in former French colonies in the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa, not discussing race, gender, and sexuality is not an option. My classes help students make connections with contemporary issues in the US. In Kentucky, I learned that to promote foreign language studies or any kind of studies, you needed to look for allies in the legislature and create close contacts with the legislature. It would be best also if you supported high school teachers as they are the ones to send their students to your courses and they are the most threatened. I realize how particular governors negatively impacted public schools. Graduate school did not teach me any of that.

KR: The historian-specific takeaway I want to impress no matter your situation is that your content and author choices make a huge impact also, and even if you must sneak in the material that shows the value and particularly the agency of the most vulnerable and minoritized students' identities on your campus, I hope you will. I personally foreground specifically the needs, perspectives, and histories of the marginalized students, and I don't pretend otherwise. And I have that conversation pretty directly, from the first email before classes start, but if you need a less direct route, that's where our disciplines come in handy. So while I might say "I love art history because x, y, or z queer, trans, anti-racist, disabled, working class, etc. reason and that's why I study, teach, and write it," you can say "History is important in the ways it can help us understand our current moment"… and then whatever that might be for your class that they will eventually come to understand is more specifically queer and anti-racist, etc. You can passive-voice the content if you must and then keep asking open-ended questions. Just make sure to be super transparent about the process, which particularly helps our most vulnerable students. But we have to commit

ourselves to teaching, subtly or not, the specific historical moments that most clearly give these students agency and understanding about what's happening to them now. They need us to, and they might never hear it anywhere else, especially with the increasing focus on pre-professionalism of most universities.

TP: In Florida, the legislation isn't aimed at us in particular but has implications for our classes. Student attitudes have also evolved and many faculty have faced threats that they will be reported for teaching seemingly apolitical topics like the birth of the working classes in the Industrial Revolution. It's a situation where any class analysis is immediately equated with communist ideology. There has been a growing "sympathetic" focus on France in Right-wing media: similar great replacement narrative; transnational Far Right activisms have drawn U.S. attention to France. This means that certain students are looking to be combative over France and Europe more broadly. Migration, Islam, colonialism are flash topics in the French/Francophone field. I'm not sure historians of France and the Francophone world have something unique to contribute versus other historians, but some things we can do include supporting our Americanist colleagues unequivocally; acting with respect to our areas of expertise: colonialism, the Holocaust, etc.; organizing as individuals and departments. We can engage in Michel de Certeau's tactics by "precision framing" of everything we discuss, being explicit about setting a tone and being transparent with students about our pedagogic reasons for content and author choices. We can DOCUMENT EVERYTHING as if we are going to face legal action. We can employ "preemptive cooperation" to set terms: "Of course Fanon is part of the Western canon!" "Of course I am integrating multiple perspectives without bias when I teach Rudyard Kipling, Karl Pearson, E.D. Morel, and Roger Casement side-by-side and ask students to draw their own conclusions about European colonialism at the turn of the century!" We can also protect vulnerable colleagues by redirecting scrutiny. Do we need to choose a course to be reviewed? "Intro to European History" is less likely to raise hackles than other survey courses. This extends to legal action: white, tenured, cis faculty can (and do!) engage on behalf of more vulnerable colleagues. We can listen to and support our vulnerable students! We can BE HISTORIANS in the classroom, explaining the need to include voices that legislators are trying to erase. We can foreground our students: it's their education, and they are often as worried as we are. Students want to learn the things that these bills are meant to silence. Students want to attend an academic institution that follows real academic standards. Stand back and help students lead the charge when they choose and are able to do so. As de Certeau notes, however, tactics are the tools of the weak. These are reactions; the wave of new laws has kept faculty inundated and left the initiative to legislators and administrations. Even leaving the state is just a temporary solution. The reality is that Florida, Texas, etc. are just testing grounds.

CG: French History, for me, became a less confrontational way for students to investigate their own history and biases. Students often respond well to connecting source material

and lectures to the political crises they are experiencing. However, if you feel unsafe, unwelcome, unprotected, or outright targeted by the political climate, that can have an enormous impact on your mental and emotional stress. I would never recommend sacrificing your or your family's well-being for a "learning opportunity."

How can we support our LGBTQ+ students and students of color in light of current controversies over teaching their histories? How might we teach gender, sexual, and racial histories in ways that can address students from different backgrounds and who might have different politics? What strategies can be effective when our research or teaching draws political scrutiny?

JC: We cannot only concentrate on one issue, thinking about race, gender, or sexuality, but we need to consider the interconnection of many other issues. Make connections with stakeholders and how to find allies or, rather, accomplices. Students often show us how. The Rice Student Newspaper, *the Thresher*, wrote an article in September 2023 to explain that "As Texas closes the doors of queer resource centers at public universities across the state, [the student organization] Rice Pride is opening theirs. On June 14, Gov. Greg Abbott signed a law banning DEI offices and initiatives at state-funded universities in Texas, as well as the hiring or assigning an employee to conduct DEI office duties. At Rice, students are often at the forefront of resistance. In 2018, before the 2020 wave of toppled/destroyed statues around the country, they voiced their vehement discontent about the racial climate on campus and the statue of William Marsh located in the middle of the quad. A more diverse body of students includes many who resent having to face a statue celebrating a former slaver on their way to class. It was up to faculty to decide if they wanted to support them. Since Rice was desegregated, Black faculty had been very active, but in 2018, more of their white colleagues decided to share the burden. It was partly in response to pressure from students and faculty that Rice launched a Task Force on Slavery, Segregation and Racial Injustice in 2019, upsetting some powerful alumni and donors. Composed of faculty, alumni, and trustees or board members, the group submitted a final report in 2023 that angered some people. President Desroches requested the assistance of former president Ruth Simmons to deal with the repercussions of this report. Simmons is a former Rice trustee and, as the President of Brown University, she was the first person in U.S. academia to create a task force on slavery. Of course, let's not forget attacks on reproductive rights and abortion in Texas. For instance, a highly successful teach-in on Abortion, co-organized by faculty members and including two deans, took place in September 2021; however, it displeased some members of the community, some alumni, some members and certain individuals in the Rice administration. So, there it is. Courage will become more and more critical. We have to decide when to let things go and when to fight. But before fighting, we have to start organizing.

KR: As "the campus queer" and first faculty member to be publicly non-binary trans, I'm

now as far out of the closet at my workplace as it's possible to be. I'm therefore more likely to have queer and trans folks on campus reach out to me, which is more uncompensated labor— but at least for a good cause—and I can use that to put pressure on powerholders in ways more stealth people often can't (and shouldn't have to). One way I support our most vulnerable students when their histories or personhood are on the chopping block is by integrating my teaching ideals, my disciplinary engagements, and my own identities. I have put some activist materials in there alongside some attendance and grading policy treatises because to me these go together and fit nicely with teaching history, and I bring that combination into every class I teach regardless of that day's or semester's content. I tell students my classroom is a space in which no one has to share my views to get a good grade, and that they can write the assignments from their perspective, as long as it's informed by the course materials and good argumentation. Be transparent, and mean it, and the conservative extremist students will have a much harder time critiquing you (some may even listen to you and come to think differently, as has been my experience), but you're also really helping the minoritized students engage. There is tons of evidence to back that up in the scholarship of teaching and learning. You can also educate students about the institution and these increasingly dangerous laws. Many of them have no idea how state laws even work. They definitely don't know how tenure works. They don't know the gutting of the humanities is a racist, anti-immigrant, anti-first generation enterprise. They don't know that some of you can't do whatever you want in terms of courses you teach. It can be helpful to be very clear about that at the outset, so students don't think it's you personally being unsupportive, particularly if you need to keep a relatively "objective" persona in the classroom. If you are tenured, positionally safe, and/or confident about being vulnerable about yourself in the classroom, that can also be good and has worked for me—but that's very individual. Finally, know that they think they're in this alone, or have to figure it out themselves, and they do not need vague assurances that "it gets better." Believe them when they say how they feel even if you can't relate, listen to them, give them clear support, and then give them specific options for how to proceed through their situation or put them in touch with someone who can. It's absolutely true that you're not a professional therapist and if your students need that, you should help them get to one. But it's equally true that your students need to see you as a human being with feelings who sees them as individual human beings you care about. You can show just that directly without being more specific if you need to, and you can also show it in a variety of stealth ways—and you must! Then—especially if you are facing the same attacks, take care of yourself. Develop a network of colleagues on your campus, across faculty and staff, where different people can take the load at different times for different situations. That will help you feel less alone, and it's just good practice so that you can sustain your energy for the fight. We need you in it!

CG: I had an LGBTQ+ student talk to me during office hours about some difficult parts of his experience on campus. I was glad he felt my office was somewhere he could be his

authentic self. I had two Hindu students who were already isolated because they had to pack their own lunches since our Dining Services could not accommodate their diets adequately. They recounted some of the racist things that were said to them. One student said she was asked "if she was a feather Indian or a dot Indian." I wanted to be a voice for these students on campus. I knew that I taught gender, class, race, sexuality, and concepts of equity. I wanted to make sure these things were still going to be taught and that students would not just enter an echo chamber if I left. However, at the same time, I began getting nervous about the days when I taught about feminism, gender and masculinity, or even George Sand. One of my students said that his classmates thought I was "too woke," after assigning a book on the Slave Trade. I worried about what might happen when students complained, and which values the administration would support. Colleagues can truly make or break any working situation. I developed wonderful, supportive, faculty friendships across disciplines. I realized quickly that other faculty felt the same way I did about supporting diversity and inclusion and teaching difficult subject matter that could get us into trouble if the administration looked too closely.

How might an organization like WSFH (or SFHS) best support colleagues working in challenging circumstances?

TP: Build bridges with colleagues, across departments, across colleges, across institutions. Also, state and national action. Unionize, unionize, unionize. Our state-wide faculty union and local university chapters have been the first and only bulwark. This is the basis for any statewide action, but also really matters on the institutional level. Effectiveness evidenced by SB 256: unions now required to have 60% membership to certify and can no longer take dues from paychecks directly. This shows legislators understand the threat unions represent. Make allies in Legislature, Board of Governors, Boards of Trustees, even with High School Teachers. Boards are political appointees but many still care deeply about effective teaching and reputation. They can be made to understand the academic stakes of new laws. National organizations can and should advocate and defend. For WSFH and similar, any action will be largely declarative. The AHA *should* (but likely won't) take legal action. AAUP and HELU are staunch allies, but their action also relies on local organizing.

CG: I think we could support colleagues working in difficult places and institutions through collective action and advocacy, but also through small acts of kindness. When colleagues in Florida start experiencing anti-DEI experiments or an assault on tenure, this is not just a Florida issue. Tenure-track positions are disappearing. If we do not realize it is all our jobs to work against this tide of administrative bloat, political pressures, financial constriction, and culture wars, then we will never recover from these challenging times. Say something to your government representatives. Start unions. Support your colleagues at challenging institutions by asking them what they need. Share resources between

institutions. And protect and help your most vulnerable students. This is a fight for all of us.

What about the COVID-19 pandemic?

CG: In the fall of 2020, when most schools were offering remote or Zoom options to protect students and staff, Erskine College decided it would be entirely in-person. This decision, I realized, was based less on science than the college's need for the students' room and board dollars. Small schools like Erskine relied on students living on-campus to make their operating budget. Since Erskine's financial margins were so narrow and we were frequently in the red, the administrators ignored the scientific advice of experts and offered faculty one canister of anti-bacterial wipes and 10 surgical masks for the semester. I was assigned to teach in auditoriums and in the choir room, neither room even had desks for the students (only chairs). Few people in South Carolina were willing to get vaccinated or mask for as long as in other places. There was little investment in recording equipment or software. Nonetheless, we were asked to teach online and in-person at the same time for the dozens of students in quarantine. The Wi-Fi was quickly overwhelmed and we were responsible for making sure students in quarantine did not fall behind.

KR: Elon also decided to stay in-person from Fall 2020 on, a fact that is regularly bragged about by our administration as a sign of our greatness. I see it differently, even though I understand the financial reasons that informed that decision. I was one of the few faculty (roughly 8%, I was told) who won my fight to teach online for the first year, and I'm one of the few people remaining on campus who still wear a mask, try to meet in well-ventilated and outdoor spaces, and encourage my students in these directions, even though Fall 2024 has begun with one of the biggest spikes of transmission in the entire history of this virus. Across that time, I have learned more than I wanted to know about ableism, both institutionally and interpersonally, as well as the disregard the U.S. and its institutions have for our students' health. As more scholarly research comes in about the risks of reinfection for negative outcomes regardless of age or current health profile, our scholarly institutions seem to turn more definitively away from their results. This for me is a depressing sign of the impacts of fear, denial, ableism, privilege, and wage-theft capitalism on higher learning—the very places that should be addressing scientific research directly, listening to experts in the field, and encouraging annual vaccinations and masking during high-transmission periods. It also ignores that we spread this virus not just among our colleagues, students, and staff but off campus, and we take it home to household and community members who may lack the privileges in health care and time off from work that those making that decision clearly have. What began as an effort in most institutions, including my own, to keep everyone safe and healthy has ended in willful ignorance and selfishness for the sake of apparent normalcy. Ironically perhaps, educating our students about the problems in the very concept of normalcy can be

helpful—queer, trans, and disabled students know what it's like to be the odd person out, and how we can find strength and community in our rejection of a "normalcy" that seeks our absence, invisibility, or destruction. And French history is rife with examples of brilliant challenges to the popular appearance or definition of normalcy, as well as examples of the folly of ignoring the common good.

JC: The pandemic has worsened incivility and, thus, attacks against and within academia in the US. The pandemic was also an experimental period where colleagues could gauge how much their administration valued their lives and their work. As faculty working at Rice, I experienced how the administration used the most humane ways to deal with the health crisis. The way Rice wanted to conduct itself during the pandemic gave me an idea about how Rice could also conduct itself in a politically hostile environment. During the pandemic, Rice often went against what the Texas legislature wanted as far as compulsory vaccination was concerned, for instance.

What about leaving an institution or academia altogether?

CG: One of the first and most important factors to weigh when deciding to leave is the day-to-day quality of working conditions at your college or university. Choosing to leave a Tenure-Track position as someone untenured is never an easy decision. I do not think there is one right or wrong decision for any person or their family. I could distill my decision to leave Erskine College into four categories: day-to-day quality of life, administrator support or effectiveness, state and institutional politics, concern for or affinity for colleagues or students, and the job market conditions. If your institution is making it difficult to do the very basics of your job, working against your health and safety, and not offering the support and resources needed to teach effectively, then that might be a factor in deciding to leave. Related to this point, your administration, whether they are supportive and effective, or less so, directly relates to your working conditions. If your administration is responsive, supportive, and working to improve both the student and employee experience, then I think, this could be the difference between leaving and staying. I also realized quickly how much can change with a shift in administration. So, even a school that was maybe right for you and your family at the moment can quickly become untenable. The political climate of the state, local, and institution are also major factors that pushed me towards leaving. While living in South Carolina, my health was endangered by misinformation about Covid-19 and vaccines. As a woman, living in a state without adequate access to women's health in a post-Dobbs world, the state policies made a future in South Carolina terrifying. In South Carolina, the court upheld a law which would, "ban abortion after embryonic cardiac activity can be detected, which is generally around six weeks of pregnancy." I could no longer imagine making a home or starting a family there. Next, I think your relationship with colleagues and students is one of the other factors to weigh when deciding to leave. Despite many aspects of the job being very

difficult and made more difficult by Erskine's financial situation, there were other daily factors that made the job more difficult to leave. While my students were often under-supported and underserved by the institution, I began to worry about what might happen to them if I left. The largest factor in deciding to leave a position is the fact that European History jobs, as a whole, are at an all-time low. Any discussion about "leaving" implies that there is somewhere else to go. For many faculty, there simply is no other option. My best friend from work was fostering a child which meant he was unable to move out of state. So, for the next 12 years, until his child turned 18, he would be tied to upstate SC. I encourage empathy, and perhaps, refrain from judging colleagues in positions that would be untenable for you. I do not think I am being dramatic when I talk about a crisis in the job market. While this job instability is not reserved for French Historians alone, the problem is particularly acute in our field. Since the option for many of our colleagues is between taking difficult jobs in academia or choosing an alternative career path, I do not pretend to fully describe the anguish and emotional energy that might take.

Any final thoughts?

JC: My main goal is to find ways to thrive no matter what the particular political moment we're living in. Now more than ever, being a part of Academia is being political. The minute I had the opportunity to leave Kentucky and get into a private school, I moved, thinking that option was safer. I know, the naivety!!! Working at Rice confirmed what I learned in Kentucky: We cannot concentrate solely on one issue, such as race or gender; we must also consider the interconnections with many other issues, including health. My short presentation needs to include the pandemic. However as far as social issues are concerned, Rice has often been "quiet" but since 2019, it has gradually been opening up to more active discussions on racial and social justice. So now I have to talk about the importance of courage, responsibility, and privilege.

KR: I don't think I have or that there is *a* right answer. Instead, There are two things I can say about that that I think are particularly relevant in today's context: 1) becoming the "campus queer" as in I was the FACE of all things LGBTQIA for the entire campus, gave me a view that is quite a bit different than the one I had as "just" a queer professor (as well as a public recognition factor that I wasn't actually seeking), and 2) I'm fairly confident that one reason my cries to be replaced by full-time student life staff were successful is because as a faculty member I was able to be effective in that role in ways that staff could not. I was able to ignore student life administrators, colleagues, and outside constituents trying to keep the students and DEI staff down "in their place" AND I could encourage the students to protest more frequently and effectively as part of my academic freedoms. It was my disciplinary training, including in French historical studies, that made me such a menace to polite society that it was worth replacing my almost entirely free labor with what are now multiple paid staff positions. I also want to remind

us that we have these advantages both structural and disciplinary that we can use for good depending on the situation. It's crucial to recognize that we all have our own positionalities in this conversation, including different levels of threat assessment which is a complex and personal calculus. I value the differences in our ways of teaching, advising, and working with students. If you're feeling overwhelmed, back away! Times are tough enough. Come back to this work when you are ready. But do come back.

TP: We can't take the value of academic freedom for granted. In this moment when it's under siege, we have to reaffirm for our students and for the public why academic freedom is vital. At the end of the day, our students want a diverse, equitable, intellectually challenging environment that exposes them to lots of worldviews. To be an academic in this moment means to engage in the fight for academic freedom. We can all do this in different capacities and to different extents but do it we must.

CG: We are in this together. The assault on academic freedom in Florida, Texas, or anywhere else tends to have ripple effects elsewhere. Have courage to fight for your colleagues and students. As a stably employed person, I am part of a small minority in academia. I recognize the positions of privilege I occupy and seize the opportunity to fight battles for those who might not have the same flexibility. No one can tackle the confluence of issues facing the academy alone. As Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) programming is under assault almost everywhere, remember that we are not fighting these battles alone. We must stand together with the aim of protecting EVERY individual's right to not just exist, but thrive and grow into thoughtful and civic-minded participants in public life. A multi-dimensional problem requires creative and sustained resistance, advocacy, and commitment. Support your colleagues that are under assault from conservative legislatures, shrinking budgets, increasing service, and the ruthless elimination of tenure-track lines in favor of temporary and low-paying positions. Support your students whose education is often the first victims of the assault on academic freedom, discriminatory practices, and budget cuts.

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