

Please vote NO on Oregon Senate Bill 664 (2019). This well-intended bill perversely amplifies the emotional divisiveness that it intends to prevent, and selectively mandates promoting only one perspective over propitious alternatives. Thank you. John Beahrs, Portland OR. February 14, 2019

Oregon Senate Bill 664 (2019) proposes a mandate on public schools to provide instruction on the Holocaust, other genocides, and similar acts of mass violence. This bill is a devil's pact – on the one hand, designed to fulfill history teaching's mandate; but on the other, actually serving to indoctrinate students into victim-enhancing identity politics that pit grievance groups against one another and against their society at large. Consider both polarities. Seemingly in favor, genocide (1) happens, (2) is evil, (3) is part of history, and (4) accurate education about history is a precondition for a functioning democracy. But at the same time, the bill fails in several critical regards. One, there's no new factual content. Even during the postwar era of national pride we were taught the evils of slavery, displacing natives, the Holocaust, other genocides, and a variety of past and current injustices. Many corrective actions were taken, with others proposed and debated. What's new, is replacing factual education with ideological indoctrination into grievance-driven identity politics that pits well-indoctrinated believers against blameworthy deniers, misdirected against those who instead promote the common rights and obligations of citizenship. This is multiply problematic. One, indoctrination and coercive enforcement define tyranny, as opposed to democracy's dependence on unbiased factual education and free debate. They lie on a slippery slope toward the Utopian extremism that rationalized history's two largest scale mass slaughters, and today we're already seeing widespread coercive suppression of dissent. Two, the bill confuses "genocide" with social injustices that are different-in-kind, although problematic in themselves. This category error unnecessarily inflames passions about these injustices, polarizes allies against enemies as opposed to emphasizing citizens' common interest, and dilutes the horrific impact of true genocide. Three, most fatal, is an implicit anti-democratic bias – covertly undermining the unbiased factual education and free debate on which true democracy depends. Please vote NO on OR SB 664. Thank you.