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## **Free Speech Groups Defend Black History Month Exhibit Removed on Grounds of Offence**

New York, NY, 2/10/2017- The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California are urging a California High School District to immediately redisplay an exhibition of paintings celebrating Black History Month. The exhibition was abruptly terminated after it was deemed to be politically charged. The groups are also asking the school district to put policies in place that prevent future viewpoint discrimination against artworks.

In February each year the African American Students Association (AASA) selects art for display in the administrative offices of the East Side Union High School District, San Jose, CA, to celebrate Black History Month. This year, Reverend Jeff Moore, president of the local branch of the NAACP, who organized the exhibition on behalf of AASA, invited San Francisco artist Mark Harris to exhibit a selection of his paintings focusing on the African-American experience. The exhibit was only on display for a few hours before District Superintendent Chris Funk had it removed, saying that he received complaints and that the District should not “advocate one position or another as a public institution.”

The joint letter to Superintendent Funk underlines that claims of offensiveness do not justify the removal of artworks, and that banishing the voice of an artist because he dislikes the ideas expressed in his work is likely to be an unconstitutional act of viewpoint discrimination.

“Black History Month celebrates and reflects the rich and diverse history and contributions of African-Americans. It is ironic that on this occasion the voice of an African-American artist, invited on behalf of an African American Association, has been censored because his work presents the painful history of racial conflict. Are colorful artifacts and joyful images the only portrayal of African American culture the District would allow?” asked NCAC’s Director of Programs Svetlana Mintcheva.

[READ THE LETTER](#)

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*The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of 56 national non-profit organizations dedicated to defending freedom of thought, inquiry and expression*