

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

July 14, 2021

Margaret Koch
Director
Bullock Texas State History Museum
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Dear Ms. Koch,

As organizations dedicated to free expression, particularly in the arts, culture and education, we are deeply concerned by your decision to abruptly cancel a July 1 event with the authors of *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*. [According to media reports](#), the Bullock Texas State History Museum withdrew as co-host of the virtual event in the wake of pressure from a number of state politicians, including Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, who announced on Twitter that he “told staff to cancel this event.” The Museum cited “increased social media pressure.”

Forget the Alamo reframes the history of the Battle of the Alamo, complicating traditional narratives by highlighting the role preserving slavery played in Texas’s fight for independence from Mexico. In our polarized political climate, the topic is as controversial as it is relevant. But discussing a book about a historical event at a history museum does not constitute an endorsement of the views expressed by the authors. On the contrary, by hosting the event, the museum was doing exactly what a history museum should be doing: offering space for discussion. Indeed, the event was precisely in line with the Bullock Museum’s [stated mission](#) to “interpret the continually unfolding Story of Texas through meaningful educational experiences.”

With increasing frequency, elected officials are using their power to pressure cultural institutions to censor ideas with which they disagree. There is often an underlying threat that they will somehow punish the institution, even though that would violate the First Amendment. It is understandable that museum leaders would feel that you must take Patrick’s words seriously because he is a member of the state board that oversees the museum.

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Professors
American Association of University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children’s Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Freedom to Read Foundation
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The NewsGuild-CWA
PEN America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education Council of the U.S.
Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women’s American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

However, it is ultimately up to museum leaders to defend the museum's commitment to providing a wide range of programming, allowing audiences to encounter new and controversial ideas, to challenge their own preconceptions and to broaden their thinking. Protecting the autonomy of cultural institutions from political partisanship is a core responsibility of those charged with administering them.

Those who are entrusted to run our cultural institutions must be prepared to withstand pressures coming from many sides. This is not easy. Resisting pressure to shape programming around the views of board members and politicians is made especially difficult when a museum's funding may appear to be threatened. But maintaining the political autonomy of these institutions is more important than ever. We urgently depend on a vibrant cultural sphere to sustain a broad civic conversation free of the confines of political silos and independent of the pressure of political agendas.

As civil society organizations committed to an open public sphere, we are always ready to mobilize our diverse constituencies in support of cultural leaders and their right to autonomy.

Warmest regards,

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by:
The Authors Guild
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
PEN America