

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

February 3, 2025

Steven Reed, Mayor  
103 North Perry St  
Montgomery, AL 36104

*Sent via email to [mayor@montgomeryal.gov](mailto:mayor@montgomeryal.gov)*

Dear Mayor Reed,

I am writing on behalf of the National Coalition Against Censorship, a 50-year-old coalition of over 60 national organizations dedicated to upholding freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression. Our [Arts & Culture Advocacy Program](#) is the only national project dedicated to working with artists and cultural institutions in the service of protecting artistic freedom in the United States.

We are alarmed by the premature removal of an art billboard that is part of a temporary project with the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, shortly after you called for its deinstallation. The billboard shows a 1965 Spider Martin photograph of state troopers staring down Black civil rights protesters on Bloody Sunday, with the slogan popularized by our current president, “make America great again” in the foreground.

Coming from a public official who is tasked with overseeing the general functions of the Montgomery Museum, your call to remove the Bloody Sunday image because, in your opinion, it wrongfully “politicizes” the Selma civil rights protests, raises serious First Amendment concerns.

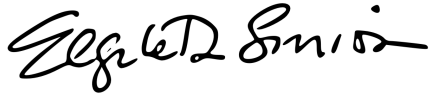
Though you may not agree with the politics or the vision of the artists behind the billboard, your position overseeing the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts does not give you the right to enforce your personal political perspective on the museum’s programming. In a democratic society, artists have the right to comment on political issues by invoking our nation’s history, and museums hold a responsibility to society at large. While for some the billboard may be “divisive” and disturbing, others in the community may appreciate the parallels it draws between histories of segregation and structural racism, and the calls by the current presidential administration to outlaw initiatives focused on racial equality and inclusion. As a public official you cannot discriminate against one point of view by siding with another and demanding the removal of a work which you find disagreeable.

## 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  
Dramatists Guild of America  
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund  
Educational Book & Media Association  
First Amendment Lawyers Association  
Free Speech Coalition  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International Association of Art Critics United States (AICA-USA)  
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 Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
National Youth Rights Association  
The News Guild-CWA  
PEN America  
People for the American Way  
PFLAG National  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Poets & Writers  
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  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ, Office of Communication  
United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications  
Women’s American ORT  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation  
Writers Guild of America, East  
Writers Guild of America, West

We urge you to rectify your statement, apologize to the artists, and support the MMFA in reinstalling the billboards so they may be on view per the predetermined agreement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Larison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elizabeth" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Larison".

Elizabeth Larison  
Director, Arts & Culture Advocacy Program  
National Coalition Against Censorship