



**Rabbinical Association
of Greater Miami**

 **HADASSAH**
Greater Miami

RAGM, NCJW, Hadassah support teaching of AP African American Studies, DEI initiatives

March 23, 2023 – The Rabbinical Association of Greater Miami (RAGM), The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) Greater Miami Section, and Hadassah Greater Miami express concern over the assault on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in higher education by the State of Florida. We unequivocally support the teaching of a wide array of cultures, including but not limited to AP African American Studies in high schools throughout Miami-Dade County and the State of Florida, and Jewish Studies on college campuses. Specifically, we worry that the attempt to over-legislate these spaces has already created an intimidating atmosphere within organizations that receive government funding which makes it more challenging to combat antisemitism, racism and all forms of bigotry.

As we enter the month of Nissan and prepare to retell the Passover story of the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt, we are reminded of how important it is to pass down our story from generation to generation. Many rabbis understand the word Pesach (Passover) as "*Peh Sach*," translated from Hebrew as "the mouth that speaks." While speaking is often the prelude through which a person conducts a *mitzvah* (commandment), when we tell the Passover story, the *mitzvah* is the act of speaking itself because only once a person has escaped bondage do they have freedom of expression. Telling our story is an act of rebellion against the Ancient Egyptians and the countless others who have oppressed the Jewish people in various ways throughout the millennia. It is a proud demonstration that we continue to thrive and that we still have our voice.

Our Jewish community is diverse, and we find our roots all over the world. Many of us trace our ancestry back to the Middle East or Europe; others to Central or South America; yet others go back hundreds or thousands of years in Africa – some of our culturally richest Jewish communities come from Ethiopia, Uganda and Morocco. We take pride in the multitude of voices within the Jewish world, and Jewish life is enriched by our diversity.

To deny any community the ability to learn or share its collective story is to minimize their contribution and significance to the society in which they live. The ritual of the Passover Seder, a right afforded to every Jew, provides the basis upon which generation after generation of Jews have created shared memory. Memory, paired with a keen sense of our culture and our history, has been the key to our survival in every place and time that we have lived. We retell these stories not because we wish to talk about our past, but rather talking about our collective past informs our present identity and our values. To silence someone's story is to rob them of a part of their identity.

In order to fulfill the mitzvah of telling the Passover story in its entirety, all people everywhere – Jewish and non-Jewish – must be free to tell and retell the entirety of theirs. That includes but is not limited to AP African American Studies, which deserves its rightful place alongside AP European History, AP Chinese Language and Culture, AP Spanish Language and Culture and many other Advanced Placement courses in high schools in Miami-Dade County and throughout our state. It also includes a fair and balanced approach by the government to DEI initiatives. Our America is richer because of the multiple peoples that have come to these shores over centuries. Teaching these stories to our students is not indoctrination but rather provides the framework necessary for us to engage with those different than us, and strengthens our bonds with one another. May this upcoming Passover be a sweet one, and may God bring health and healing to the Jewish people and all people of the world.