

October 17, 2022

Cheryl Todmann, Vice President for Communications and Marketing
Pittershawn Palmer, Communications Publications Editorial Manager

Dear Vice President Todmann and Ms. Palmer:

I am writing on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee. Our charge is to defend academic freedom as a professional right of all CUNY faculty. Academic freedom is grounded in the faculty member's qualifications for the position as reviewed by his/her peers. It consists in the freedom to teach, research, write, and to speak in our capacity as citizens without restraint by the administration.

We note with great alarm the fact that Kingsborough's Office of Communications and Marketing has refused to use an image from the cover of the book *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South*, written by Professor Kristina DuRocher and published by Kentucky University Press, in an announcement for the upcoming panel discussion "From Parent to Child? – Intergenerational Transmission of Hate." Our understanding is that the decision was made by Vice President Todmann and that the book's cover image was deemed "too triggering" to be used in an email announcement to Kingsborough faculty, despite the fact that a university press deemed it completely appropriate for a scholarly work on the history of white supremacy in the segregated South.

We are of course sympathetic to the notion that certain images are indeed triggering of traumatic responses. However, the line to be drawn is not one that can be determined arbitrarily by the college's administration and then imposed upon faculty members with expertise that bears upon the decision—in this case, the decision to use the image made by the organizer of the panel, who is a distinguished historian, an expert who has also written on the subject, and the Research and Programming Director of the Kingsborough Holocaust Center.

I wish to remind you that the preamble to the CUNY-PSC contract reads as follows: "CUNY and the PSC seek to maintain and encourage, in accordance with law, **full freedom of inquiry, teaching, research and publication of results**, the parties subscribe to Academic Freedom for faculty members. The principles of Academic Freedom are recognized as applicable to other members of the Instructional Staff, to the extent that their duties include teaching, research and publication of results, **the selection of library or other educational materials** or the formation of academic policy" (my emphases). In this case, it seems clear that members of the college's management have overstepped their bounds in arbitrarily suppressing certain educational materials chosen by a faculty member—namely, the image on this book cover—for purposes of disseminating research to the college community. Frankly, beyond being a violation of academic freedom, this seems to be a case of outright censorship of basic First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and political expression.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the images originally chosen by the faculty member organizing this event be used in the way they were originally intended. Failing that, we will have

to assume that this is simply an arbitrary violation of academic freedom by the college's management and will act accordingly.

I look forward to your prompt response and am ready to provide further information or answer any questions you might have. On behalf of the committee, I look forward to the speedy resolution of this disturbing situation.

Sincerely,

Professor Anthony Alessandrini
On behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee

CC: Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
President Claudia V. Schrader
Provost Joanne Russell
Associate Provost Sharon Warren Cook
Dean of Faculty Gordon Alley-Young
Professor Elke Weesjes Sabella
PSC-CUNY Principal Officers and Executive Committee
Professor Douglas Medina, Chair, University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Committee