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Interview of Peter Messer

Peter Messer 00:00

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Samuel Hurwitz 00:41

[Intro music fades in] Historians and Their Histories is a podcast by the Massachusetts Historical Society. It introduces listeners to our community of researchers. We learn about the paths that they took to become a student of the past and the projects they're working on at the MHS. I'm Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer and Editor in the research department at the MHS. Today, we are sitting down with Peter Messer, an Associate Professor of history at Mississippi State University, and a recipient of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati from the MHS. Could you just give us a background of who you are and what you do?

Peter Messer 01:21

As noted, I'm an Associate Professor of history at Mississippi State. Most of my research is on early America. I study politics in particular, more political culture than elections and voting and things like that. I have a long interest in trying to figure out what actually politics are to 18th century Americans, as well as the many ways in which they try to practice them. My interest in the American Revolution comes out of that. And part of this interest in politics and the Revolution is kind of how did it all work. You know, what made this thing possible? Sort of starting from the notion that I picked up as an undergraduate, that most revolutions fail, and at least in a broad sense, the American Revolution did not fail or did not fail completely. And so, so I'm kind of constantly asking why, and what is it about the politics of the time that made that possible.

Samuel Hurwitz 02:24

So why did you become a historian? Was there something in your in your youth, in your past, that really made you clutch on to history? Was there a person, a book? Was it school?

Peter Messer 02:37

So, part of it is my experience as a kid where my father had an interest in history, and so we went to a lot of historical sites on vacations. When I was a small child, we lived my father worked for the Indian Health Service, and we lived next to the Little Bighorn battlefield. And so, there was this historical place right nearby the house where you, you were, at least given this sense as you walked around, that this is, this is where the past happened, and important things happened here. What were they, and why were they, why did they matter? Why do people care about them? So that kind of, I guess, got me started in it. Two people I have to credit. One is my elementary school teacher, Rita Montgomery. I was uninterested in much of what was going on, and the way in which she had designed the social studies or the history curriculum allowed her to kind of let me do my own thing. And so, the part of my early education that was completely accidentally would that allowed me to pursue the thing that interested me was the part of my early education that was about history. And so, I think that built on it. And then later on, in high school, I had another teacher, Steven Betcher, who did the same thing, who allowed me to kind of use his history class to pursue my own interests. And maybe if he had been a physics teacher, it would have been physics, but it was kind of history where I was able to kind of explore the things that interested to me, and I think that's what pushed me in that direction.

Samuel Hurwitz 04:16

And did you further refine your understanding of history in undergraduate or was that more graduate school?

Peter Messer 04:22

Yes, as an undergrad is kind of the pivotal moment. I was taking a class with Matthew Dennis, and we read Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* and that book, the way it sort of creates is a very complicated explanation for how you get racism and how you get slavery and at the same time, how you get a republic, right? This fascinated me, both in the complexity of the argument and the fact that it seemed sort of very relevant, even then in the '80s and

‘90s that you know, asking the question of, what are the limits of our democracy, our Republic, and where did they come from? Why are they there? And so, I credit that class and that book with sort of making me think, okay, history is not something I’m interested in. History is something I want to do. And I want to do early American history because it seems to be grappling with this question that I find fascinating. And so that’s what pushes me to early America, per se. And then graduate school was mostly, you know, tip of the cap to Kathleen Brown and Thomas Slaughter. Graduate school was mostly about refining that interest. I kind of figured out this is what I want to do. I want to study kind of politics and political thought in early America. And so, it was people like that who said, ‘Oh, well, have you thought about this? And maybe we could bring, you, know, gender in in a different way than you’re thinking about and this produces a much more complicated and much more interesting story for you to tell.’

Samuel Hurwitz 05:54
So, can you talk about some of the challenges that you faced as a historian?

Peter Messer 05:59
Well, I like to say the biggest challenge I face is doing history, because doing history is hard. You dream up the you dream up the project, and you think, ‘Okay, this is what I’m going to talk about, and I’m going to find the sources that talk about this.’ And then the sources never talk about that. They talk about things like that. And so, then there’s this sort of recalibration process, which is always a challenge, where you think about, ‘Okay, so what, what do we actually know? And then what’s the story I can tell based on, on, on what we know.’ So that in, in kind of the writing part has been, is consistently the most challenging, it’s also the most fun, you know, because you’re putting the puzzle together, and that’s part of, I’m a puzzler, and that’s part of what drew me to history and academia, more broadly, is that, okay, you get to pick a problem a puzzle, and then you got to try and solve it.

Samuel Hurwitz 06:51
Are there any examples from your own research that kind of touch upon those issues you just talked about?

Peter Messer 06:59

One of the projects I'm working on here is this history of Wellfleet, Massachusetts, and I got started on it when I came across this collection at MHS of the John Greenough papers a couple of years ago, actually, probably more than that. But anyway, and I was reading through the collection, and I thought, 'Oh, this is sort of an interesting experience as he's arguing with the town about his decision to sell salvaged tea.' And this is in 1774 when one did not do that. And I then managed to get a hold of the transcripts of the town meeting, and one of the things I found is that his letters don't correspond with the town meeting. The things he says he's doing in the town meeting are not recorded in the town meeting, or at least they're not recorded when he says they happen. And so, there's been this kind of, well, how do I square the circle, right? You know, how do I make sense of his narrative of what's happening with the town's narrative of what's happening? And it's, it's not a couple of days. It's, you know, he's talking about things happening in August that the town is describing is happening in January. And there's a lot, you know, things happen very quickly in you know, in the winter, spring, summer of 1774, and so the fact that you think something happened in August when it happened in January is actually quite consequential because where Massachusetts and the united colonies stand in January is very different than what they'll be standing in August. So that's sort of one of these puzzles I'm trying to get around, and to be honest, I haven't solved that one yet.

Samuel Hurwitz 08:47

So, can you go more in depth of the project you're working on at the MHS? How did this idea of this project develop over time? What drew you to it originally?

Peter Messer 08:57

The two projects, the one is this Wellfleet project. And what drew me to that was just coming across these papers on the John Greenough papers. And it was this, again, this problem of contradiction, that he is caught selling tea, that he is salvaged, and he attempts to justify his actions in kind of perfect Whig Republican language about rights and property and all of the sorts of things that notionally are going on in Boston, and yet nobody cares, right. That there is some they are not interested in this argument. They view the presence of his, of him bringing the tea, as a bigger problem. And so, I've been trying to figure out, well, why did they think that? And I end up looking backwards to what's been going on in Wellfleet since about 1720, and when you look at it that way, looking back through their experiences, as opposed

to kind of looking from what we think is interesting, the coming of the American Revolution, right? This is the signal event for us, but for them, it wasn't the signal event was sort of this ongoing local controversy dating back to 1720 and that suddenly it's clear why they're not interested in hearing Republican Whig rhetoric because ultimately, that's something they've never been interested in and they're much more interested in cultivating a specific sense of community or so it seems. As I said, still trying to figure out why his version of events don't always line up with everybody else's. So that's the kind of how I came into that. It was by accident. It was a collection I found here on my previous visits. The other project I'm working on here is the Liberty Riot, which is in 1768, and it's one of these sort of events that you learn about mostly, I suppose in AP history, or in, I was gonna say history 1063, but that doesn't mean anything to you. Introduction to US history survey course in college where you're just sort of ticking through all of the events that lead up to the American Revolution. And I was stumbled on a newspaper account of it that told a slightly different story, that focused on the event as an impressment riot, not as it's usually told in that story, as an example of kind of British overreach and customs enforcement, which triggers a sort of constitutional or a politically motivated defense of the rights of John Hancock to smuggle and, well, which was it, you know, was it the same thing? And so, I was kind of drawn in by that sort of serendipitous encounter. And then I have been interested in, kind of in riots as a form of political expression for a while. And, you know, I had done some work on the Boston Massacre, so it was sort of a subject that was, that was of interest to me. And then, as I said, I found this two things that didn't quite add up. And so I'm sort of kicking around through the John Temple papers, who was one of the people involved, and some of the records of the contemporary it's called the political records of contemporary transactions 17 whatever to 1776 which contain different versions of the riot and why it happened, and what people hoped, hope or appear to have thought they were doing. The people in Boston when they rioted, when the when the ship was seized, the sort of Sons of Liberty crowd, when they kind of intervene to help the crowd, notionally, but not really. The governor who sort of positions himself between the crowd and then, of course, the customs officials who are positioning themselves between the governor the crowd and the Sons of Liberty. So, it's sort of this kind of four-way knot, if you will, four threads coming together to create, to create an event. And it's just sort of everyone has their own story to tell about how it happened and why it happened, and kind of interested in pulling that apart.

Samuel Hurwitz 13:13

So, what does an 18th century riot look like, and did it actually make change?

Peter Messer 13:20

So, the first thing is what type of riot because it turns out, at least to my reading, that different riots look, you know, unfold differently, and a lot of it has to do with the stakes in the riot. So, for instance, a customs riot, these are riots in which people are concerned about concealing their identity because the implications of it, in terms of defying imperial authority, are greater than they are when you gather together and you pull down a brothel, which is a different type of riot, right? You have the bread riot, which just is a loose term for a collective action which is intended to make a social commentary, and it's usually is more violent in its appearance than in its fact. And then you have these other riots that, because they're less about a sort of general sense of moral outrage and more about a particular grievance with a particular policy, tend to be more targeted. They tend to have higher stakes for the government as well as for those involved. And so, they can be a little more violent, and they require people to things like, as I said before, to hide their faces. So, there are different types of riots based on what they're doing. And the two riots that are coming into conflict here is this a customs riot and if it's a customs riot, then again, as I said, that elevates the stakes of the confrontation. And it's in the interest of the commissions or the customs who are part of the parties involved, and the Sons of Liberty, to escalate the violence, or the potential of violence, or the thought of violence, really. And so, they want it to be a customs riot. And it seems to me that what the rioters thought was, well, this is an impressment riot, and that changes the meaning of it. And so, in this case, it's going to say, what does a riot look like? Well, it depends, you know what you're looking at. And you know from one perspective, from all the perspectives, it's people taking the streets. It's people doing damage, mostly to property. But one of the peculiarities of customs riot is you do damage to people as well. And the question is do they work? I guess. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I still haven't completely made up my mind about this riot, but in some ways, the riot fails. That is to say that if what the crowd is interested in doing, you know, there's the people who live and work on the waterfront in Boston, if what they're interested in doing is sending a message about impressment and about the way in which they're treated by the navy, then no, that really it doesn't work because it very quickly becomes this argument that is, you know, the way the event is usually talked about, it becomes an argument about the constitutional powers of the commissioners of the customs versus, you know, the ability of the town to not be taxed by out its

representatives, which is what the customs enforcement represents. And so, the whatever message that the crowd intended to send, at least didn't get fully communicated or didn't get fully embraced. Part of the other message the crowd wants to send is they want to be heard, and to a certain extent, they are heard in that the Sons of Liberty go to great efforts to sort of defend the crowd to prevent anyone from being arrested or anything like that. And so, the they get an acknowledgement of their voice, but essentially, they get told, and this is all I should say, speculative at this point, but they get told what to say, or what they said, so they get a voice. You can speak, but you can only speak about what we want you to speak about, which isn't necessarily what you want to speak about. And it seems to me that that's one of the that's ultimately one of the limits of crowd action in this period, is that that while the riot is an effective way to get people's attention and, in some ways, to intimidate them when it comes to a specific, specific action. It is not necessarily an effective way of creating a durable political message. I kind of have a sense that in 50 years before, in a slightly different media environment, in a slightly different economic and imperial environment, that maybe riots could have been more effective and were more effective. But again, this is speculative. This is kind of what I'm the questions I'm asking, even though I am presenting it as the answers that I have, I have uncovered.

Samuel Hurwitz 18:26
So, to what extent should we be viewing these riots as overt political acts against the crown akin to the pro-independence revolutionary literature that's being developed at that time? Should we view them within the same camp? Are these completely different acts against the Crown, or should we understand them as this is just another form of the colonists expressing some type of maybe political sentiment against the Crown?

Peter Messer 18:59
So, the riot, I would say, is adjacent to the political movement that is that is stirring against imperial policies. And what I think is happening is that really what the what the crowd actions are about primarily are local conditions that the target is an impressment, you know, seizing people off the wharf and conscripting them involuntarily in the in the British Navy, and that what the crowd is kind of interested in is telling local officials to protect their interests, not against the Crown, per se, but against being snatched off the wharf and being conscripted into the Navy. And the crown is incidental to that, right? It's part of it, but it's not the thing that they're really worried about. And the thing that makes it

useful to the people like the Sons of Liberty is that, because it is also directed at the Crown, it then becomes a useful way for them to make an argument about broader Crown policies. The rigorous enforcement of the unconstitutional Revenue Acts, right? And so, I think there's a lot of that that goes is going on in the years leading up to the American Revolution. And part of it is, it's part of a story in which there is kind of a broadly lingering discontent with a variety of both local and imperial concerns, and that what is happening is various groups, particularly, you know, the Sons of Liberty. And as I say, I think in this, in this part, ironically, the some of the commissioners of customs that there's an incentive to group all of these actions, all of the sense of discontent, into single movement or a single set of protests directed against imperial authority. And so, it's an alliance of convenience. These things are happening, not for the same reasons that other people are upset with imperial government, but they are useful. It's both, it's useful for both. I should say that, you know, the crowd, to the extent that you can talk about it having a single intent, which I admit, is kind of dodgy, but they too realize that, you know, if we are inserting ourselves into this conversation about the Empire, then we will get an audience in a way that, you know, if we were just angrily pulling down the houses of people we didn't like, we wouldn't get, right? And so, there is this, there is this kind of sense that, that it's a moment in time in which there is sort of people discontented for a variety of reasons, and that there are various ways in which they express that discontent. And the fact that, again, in this particular case, you know, a riot can be both useful for both the people who are rioting, and ultimately, people like the Sons of Liberty, who are presenting themselves as the solution to the riot, provided we stop unconstitutional taxation. You know that these things are happening at the same time. They are part of the zeitgeist, but they are actually kind of different events, right? The riot really isn't about imperial authority, in the same way that the Sons of Liberty's opposition to parliamentary taxation is about imperial authority, but because they coalesce around a similar target, they easily get, and this is from both sides, right, they get roped into that, even though they are kind of their own separate stories, if that makes any sense.

Samuel Hurwitz 22:53

Yeah, Interesting. I'm curious about you know, how much should early 1770s America be understood through riots? Are these actions confined to Boston? Are they happening in other places of the colony? Is this a pretty popular means of at least the crowd ordinary colonists to kind of make their voices or concerns heard?

Peter Messer 23:21

So, these are going back to the, I don't know I was gonna say the 17th century, but perhaps even before, crowd action is kind of a recognized form of political activity. And so in that sense that we should understand the riots that are going on as a you never want to be totally universalist, you know, grouping everything together, but broadly speaking, you can, you can view the riots as a recognized way in which those parts of the population that find themselves marginalized express their views. So, in that sense, we should look at it as an important part of what's going on, right? This is, this is how a segment of the population communicates. It communicates its political views to the people around them. Now, one does not want to then think that this is the only way those people can do that, right, the people who are kind of marginalized, and that riots are therefore happening all the time, everywhere, right? But we should see it, we should see them as as part of the political landscape, as part of the political world, and therefore we should take them seriously in the same way that we take newspapers and pamphlets and public speeches about the politics of the of the time seriously. They do seem to appear in pretty much every colony. The crucial years in terms of the riots are in the is 1765, obviously surrounding the Stamp Act. And the two biggest riots are in Newport and Boston, or Boston and Newport. But there are similar events in Charleston, South Carolina, in New York, kind of in Philadelphia as well, and New Hampshire. So, they are reasonably common. They become less common then the later you get into the 1760s, which is when this is happening. And it's because mostly the colony that is most agitated against the Crown at that period is Massachusetts, and really, it's Boston. And then as you get into this kind of 1770s after the Tea Act, then again, you start to see more crowd actions targeting importers of tea, kind of up and down the colonies. And then once the Continental Congress passes its association in 1774 again, you start to see crowds forming to target Tories and to target people who violate the association. So, there is a kind of, they're really important at the beginning, and they're really important right up in the end. And then there's this period where there are fewer crowd actions. But again, they are they are present. So, it's a, it is a persistent part of this political world. And while it would be a mistake to say that they are the most important. They are an important part. And so, part of what I'm doing is trying to is trying to place that story, the story of the riots and the crowds, in this broader argument for independence.

Samuel Hurwitz 26:34

So, let's switch gears a little bit. This is your third fellowship here at the MHS. Have there been any advantages being a returning fellow? Do you have a new eye on the collections here? Is there anything different the third time around?

Peter Messer 26:50

Well, one thing it means that there's always the set of things I didn't look at the last time I was here that I probably should have looked at. And so, you get a better and deeper knowledge of the of the collections, every time you pass through. You get better at looking at near things that are interesting to you, rather than just for things that sometimes you find. I was reading the Wendell papers, I think, and it's not obviously related to the Liberty Riot, but all of a sudden they start to talk about, you know, the ways in which merchants transactions are being are being undertaken, and how they fit into this broader economic picture of the time. And so, you find things that you didn't think would be there and that necessarily you didn't think were important. But then once you stumble on the collection and go through it, you think, 'Oh, well, maybe this is a perspective that is useful to making sense of a broader story.' So, I think that, I think, having come back. I'm more, I suppose this is, this is archives in general, that when you become familiar with an archive, and in my case, because I've been here three times, it's the Massachusetts Historical Society, you become kind of aware of, of how, how to find things and to look in places you didn't think to look because, because there might actually some be something there. I'm certainly more comfortable kind of like, okay, this is the sort of stuff that I'm likely to find.

Samuel Hurwitz 28:30

You kind of touched upon it earlier, but can you go more in depth? Tell us a little bit more about the collections and the specific sources you're using here at the MHS for your research.

Peter Messer 28:42

So, as I said, the John Greenough papers, the David Stoddard Greenough papers. This is helping me reconstruct kind of what is happening in Wellfleet. Wellfleet is a town. It's on Cape Cod as it goes, Provincetown, Turo, Wellfleet, as you go, you know, from the tip south. So, it's almost all the way out to the end. In the 1770s it's a whaling town, and it's kind of the more I dug into it, it's kind of

remarkable, because it really has nothing to do with the story of the coming of American independence, and it appears that's by choice, until this tea, the guy who lives there, salvages the tea that is wrecked at the at the end of Cape Cod, and brings it to town. And then all of a sudden, it becomes, for the winter and summer of 1774 it becomes, not the most important place, but you read the Boston newspaper, and they're very concerned about the tea in Wellfleet. So, so that's, you know, Wellfleet. It's, it's, it's this kind of town that has its 30 seconds of fame or six months of infamy, if you prefer, in in 1774 and that's and so part of then reconstructing what is actually going on in that town, part of it is the John Greenough papers, but those are kind of short, and they're focused on this one event. And you know the David Stoddard Greenough papers, David Stoddard Greenough is a clerk to one of the big wigs in Wellfleet, Elisha Doan, who I read in one of the genealogical works, was the richest man in Massachusetts, which I doubt, but you get the idea right? Anyway, and so then you know that those are a series of receipts and exchanges that give you a sense of who's doing business with whom. You know, what are the, what are the kind of internal economic networks at work in that town. And then also, what are the, what are the some of you know, because I've only got, you know, the one guy, but you know, he is doing business with other towns, and particularly with Boston and so those are the papers that allow me to kind of reconstruct some of the more individual relationships that are helping I hope to explain how the town reacts to this guy when he shows up with tea and tries to sell it. When it comes to the Liberty Riot, the thing I've read mostly here is the it's in the Winthrop papers. It's the John Temple letter book, and he's the customs official, and mostly it's just about, what did customs officials do, and how did they end up crossways with not only the merchants who they were trying to keep from smuggling, but also, as it turns out, the governor Francis Bernard did not get along with the customs office. And you kind of get at least a hint into that. And then things you the Boylston papers, the Wendell papers, the Winthrop papers, these are mostly accounts, they're merchants. And so, trying to figure out, from the perspective of the merchant class, what is it actually that they are bringing back and forth, selling to people, what goods are valuable to them? And then how does this fit into a sense of connection, both with each other, right? What are our economic dependencies? Who's losing money. Who's making money, and why? And how do they think that they can, they can more effectively make money i.e. smuggle and so those are the those are kind of the questions and the issues that I'm more specifically going through.

Samuel Hurwitz 32:33

Any unexpected finds in the sources?

Peter Messer 32:36

Well, the big one was, as I said, I had convinced myself that the letter that John Greenough writes his father was misdated, and that's because I was working from a transcript. I didn't have the physical document. And then when I got here, I discovered that, oh no, it was properly dated. Now I have to come up with another story. The depth of hostility between the customs officers and Francis Bernard, which comes out in the Temple book, was also somewhat striking to me. I had read Bernard's papers. They're published, and so I got the sense that, okay, yeah, there's something here. But then reading the same account from the perspective of the customs officials, not just simply the specific moment of the Liberty Riot, but kind of the five years before and a couple years after, you know, that gave me a fresh perspective on, I think, why Bernard is doing what he's doing, and why the customs officials are as well. So those are the two, the two, kind of most unexpected things that that I came across. I learned a lot about whaling. The whaling business, as I said, Wellfleet's a whaling town. And so, it turns out some of these merchants who I was reading to learn about the Liberty Riot are also engaged in whaling. And so, I learned, and it kind of matters, because if you're a whaling town, you know people are gone when they're whaling. And so what was interesting in, I think it was the, I think was the Wendell papers, but maybe it was wherever the Bowdoin papers were, I think actually that might be Winthrop anyway, one of the collections I read, which escapes me at the moment, just sort of gives the pattern of like when the ships left. When they came back to Boston. And so, you get a sense, you can then put that over, you know the events being described in in the town meeting in Wellfleet, it's like, wait, this is the summer. The whalers are all gone. So that means, because you can figure out who were some of the whalers in town. It's like, okay, they're not there now. How does that help explain what's happening? And so, I was researching the one project, and I stumbled on information which kind of ended up being useful for the other project.

Samuel Hurwitz 34:53

How do you think your research will help audiences better understand the past?

Peter Messer 34:57

I guess, what the hope is there anyway is that we have a tendency to think of the past in terms of the things that matter to us in the present. And the obvious example from both of these projects is that the

thing that is really important to us is understanding the American Revolution. And so, we tend to look from any particular date, especially once you get into the 1760s and 1770s to the Revolution is the thing that needs to be explained. And both of these projects, in their own different ways, remind us that the people don't know the Revolution is coming, right, and that the conflicts that that seem to interest them are not the conflicts to come, but the conflicts that were and that the past is about what people knew. It's partly about what they'd hoped for and what they'd expected, but a big part of it is what they knew, which is which led them to be concerned about things that we might think are trivial, that we know are trivial, because in 10 years, they ceased to be as important. And so, both of these projects, the idea that the Liberty Riot is actually shows a bizarre ideological similarity between the customs officials and the Sons of Liberty, right? That doesn't make sense if you think that well, you know, in about six years or eight years, they're going to really kind of blow all that up. Whereas if you think about, oh, well, where are we coming from? From the early 1760s and the 1750s you can see why both groups might want to frame the Liberty Riot as a customs riot, rather than as an impressment riot. So I guess that's, that's the part of it, I think is this, is these are stories intended to shift our perspective about what's happening in the past by again, asking us to look at the past from what I think is the perspective of the people who were there, as opposed to our perspective, not that we shouldn't ask where the American Revolution came from, but we should we should, perhaps, at times, be more humble in the assumption that this is what really mattered to people.

Samuel Hurwitz 37:20
Any concluding remarks you'd like to make?

Peter Messer 37:22
Oh, I should say that one of the challenges, one of the early questions was about challenges being a historian, and I would like to say that to date, I haven't had many challenges in terms of my teaching. Other than students say mean things about me, but this is normal, but that I think we're entering a stage where we are, as historians, going to face a whole lot of challenges, not related to my time at MHS, but while I have been at MHS. So, to give you a sense that it's happened, recently. I got an email from the dean, and apparently our campus is set to expect people who are calling themselves, what is it 'first amendment auditors.' And they are people who are most mostly not enrolled in college or in your class, who apparently are showing up at campuses in the state, and they are kind of making note of what you

do with the idea we think of, you know, sort of posting a viral video of you saying something that can be made to seem outrageous, you know, to inflame people over the way in which, you know, 'lefty professors' are indoctrinating their students. So, there's pressure coming, sort of informally, about what we say as historians and how we teach. The state of Mississippi also, while I was have been here. So again, just to suggest the fact this is really happening right now, has passed one of these 'divisive concept laws' where we are forbidden teaching our students 'divisive concepts.' And of course, what a 'divisive concept' is, it's a concept that divides people. Okay, but you know, where do you draw the line? Is it divisive to say slavery was wrong? Well, there was a period about four years ago where that wasn't divisive, and at times it seems like it might be divisive now. So, it looks like, you know, the state of Mississippi, and we're not the only ones, right? Florida has done this. Texas is doing it I think, as well. You know, are starting to insert themselves into the history classroom, right, and trying to dictate how we teach and what we teach. And I think this is, this is a troubling development. And I think as part of the Mississippi law, for instance, we have to post our syllabi online, and any person in the state can call up your syllabi and determine that your syllabi is divisive, file a complaint against you, and then you have to answer to. I think they got to change so that the board that you have to answer to is at least a university board. But nonetheless, this is all sort of intended to get us to teach history in a certain way, and those pressures appear to be growing, and it's not looking good.

Samuel Hurwitz 40:09

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