



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Anthropologists Speak Out in Protection of Academic Freedom

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The American Anthropological Association (AAA) and its more than 11,000 members worldwide join the American Historical Association (AHA) and the larger social science community in deploring efforts to ask William Cronon to release his scholarly correspondence concerning recent events and debate regarding collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin.

Dr. Cronon is a well-respected academic, and is not only the incoming president of the American Historical Association, but is also a distinguished professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Social science, anthropology, and all of the humanities-related disciplines at large have always recognized the importance of using scholarship to explore our own times. Working within this rich tradition of academic freedom, Cronon has used his deep knowledge of American history to provide a much-needed panoramic context for the recent events in Wisconsin. In doing this, he has enriched our understanding of present dialogues as well referencing the past to provide much needed historical, cultural and political perspective.

In demanding that the university supply copies of emails to and from Cronon that mention certain politicians and activities, some have encroached the sacred place of academic freedom and dangerously led this debate along the plane of partisan politics. As scholars and researchers, we assert that the right to intelligently criticize and critique current events, regardless of political affiliation, should remain sacrosanct and untouched by those who seek to gain political headway in the short term. A better approach would be to have his detractors challenge his historical account rather than publicly violate his civil and academic rights.

As we understand the statute, the purpose of the state's Open Records Law is to promote informed public conversation. Anthropologists vigorously support the freedom of information act traditions of the United States of which this law is a part. In this case, however, we fear the law has been invoked to do the opposite: to find a pretext for discrediting a scholar who has taken a public position. This inquiry will damage, rather than promote, public conversation. It will discourage other scholars employed by public institutions from speaking out as citizen-scholars in their blogs, op-ed pieces, articles, books, and other writings.

We join with the AHA in calling on public-spirited individuals and organizations to denounce this assault on academic freedom. We further call on those who would challenge rightful scholarship to participate in a forthright and fair conversation about the issues Professor Cronon has raised. As anthropologists, we welcome the opportunity to have this debate, and ask that those who would challenge Dr Cronon would meet us in a public sphere to intelligently and comprehensively discuss the issues at hand. We are ready and able to do so, and would hope those opposed to Dr Cronon's approach would do so as well. We can be contacted via the information provided below, and we look forward to a spirited dialogue.

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Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with an average annual membership of more than 10,000. The Arlington, VA – based association represents all specialties within anthropology – cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.

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