



Contact: Miriam F. Elman, miriam@academicengagement.org

February 24, 2023

Melissa Swindell, Executive Director, Georgia Writers Museum (GWM)
Lou Benjamin, President, Georgia Writers Museum (GWM)
109 S. Jefferson Ave.
Eatonton, GA 31024

Via email: director@georgiawritersmuseum.org and lkb806@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Swindell and Mr. Benjamin,

I am writing to you at the request of Professor Gary D. Grossman, one of my educational nonprofit's longtime faculty members and Professor Emeritus of Animal Ecology at the Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources, University of Georgia. Professor Grossman recently brought to my attention that Ms. Alice Walker is scheduled to deliver the Osprey Foundation's Anne River Siddons Memorial Keynote at the Georgia Writers Museum's [2023 Writers Retreat](#) this Sunday February 26.

I have been copied on many of the email exchanges that you have had these past number of days with Professor Grossman. I write now to share my dismay over your decision to provide a prominent and prestigious platform to Ms. Walker. Further, I write to express disappointment in your refusal to honor Professor Grossman's reasonable request to provide Sunday's audience and the participants at your Writers Retreat, which will likely include [area college and university students](#) who intern at GWM, with information regarding Ms. Walker's [antisemitic poetry](#) as well as her repeated endorsement of antisemitic conspiracy theorist and Holocaust denier David Icke and his hateful work. At a time when antisemitism is on the rise both [nationally](#) and in [Georgia](#), such inaction on your part is quite frankly irresponsible.

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) is an independent, non-partisan national organization that engages, educates, and empowers university faculty to counter antisemitism and support a robust dialogue about Israel and Jewish identity on U.S. campuses. It is comprised of more than 850 faculty members on nearly 300 campuses across the United States who seek to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promote robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and respond to antisemitism on campus when it occurs. Former Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler and U.S. Representative Donna Shalala serve on AEN's Advisory Board, chaired by the former President of the University of California Mark G. Yudof. Deborah Lipstadt was an AEN Advisory Board member before taking on the role of U.S. Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.

No one can deny that Ms. Walker is a famous Georgia author and acclaimed writer of the American South. Her brilliance as a writer, however, cannot excuse the fact that she is also an avowed and unapologetic anti-Semite, as has been well documented:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/alice-walker-anti-semitism-new-yorker-essay/629711/>

<https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-responds-alice-walkers-unqualified-endorsement-book-notorious-anti>

<https://timesofsandiego.com/opinion/2022/05/02/alice-walker-is-an-icon-but-her-antisemitic-views-are-problematic-on-campus/>

<https://religionnews.com/2022/04/04/disinviting-alice-walker-is-not-cancel-culture/>

Other organizations, when learning of Ms. Walker’s vile beliefs, have [reconsidered their invitations](#) to provide her with a prominent and prestigious podium. At AEN, we do not advocate for canceling voices no matter how heinous (although I would note that the decision to invite such speakers in the first place is a [choice](#)). Instead, our approach is to bring better speech to bad speech. Acknowledging Ms. Walker’s antisemitism and condemning it would be an appropriate response for you to take—even at this late date.

I encourage you to reconsider Professor Grossman’s recommendation that you disassociate from Ms. Walker’s antisemitic views in writing by releasing a statement prior to the start of your Writer’s Retreat and to make it available to all those who have registered for the event and who attend the Keynote. Ms. Walker’s Sunday Keynote may very well be “one of hope and inspiration” to Georgia writers in attendance, as you noted in your February 11 email to Professor Grossman. But, in the absence of your disavowal of her intolerable antisemitism, it will be one of deep distress and demoralization to Georgia’s Jewish community.

It behooves all of us to be upstanders when it comes to hatred and bigotry. Bestowing honors such as a keynote address on an avowed antisemite, and then refusing to even alert your audiences and program participants to the indefensible on the part of this writer, are reckless and insensitive actions that will only alienate and marginalize Jewish supporters of the GWM. Since I understand that the GWM [prominently features](#) and in fact [celebrates](#) Ms. Walker as an Eatontown, Georgia author, all without even a single mention of her espousing antisemitism, I hope that you will continue to engage on this matter and find a way to rectify this troubling situation moving forward.

If I or my organization can be of any further help, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,



Miriam F. Elman, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Academic Engagement Network

Courtesy Faculty Appointment, Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University

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