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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEES:
SEAPOWERS AND PROJECTION FORCES
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COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEES:
HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
AVIATION
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

May 3, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

As the 2020-2021 school year comes to a close, education leaders at the local, state, and national levels need to be laser-focused on ensuring our students do not stay irreversibly behind. Unfortunately, rather than put all hands on deck to save our students from the devastating impacts of school closures, I am concerned that you would instead prioritize racist pedagogy and anti-American revisionism through your recently proposed rule on American History and Civics Education under the auspices of “culturally responsive” teaching, a key product of critical race theory (CRT).¹

CRT, like “culturally responsive” education, is racist. By teaching our children to view everything through the prism of race, we not only fail our students, but also move further away from the dream of a colorblind society and towards a future in which race, not merit, determines the way society evaluates individuals. Indeed, many of the claims advanced by critical race theorists (e.g., that concepts such as objectivity, hard work, delayed gratification, and the nuclear family are aspects of “Whiteness”) can be hard to differentiate from extremist rhetoric we would rightly reject from White supremacists.² By framing nearly every aspect of American society as racist, CRT obscures healthy, difficult, and necessary conversations about racism in America, both past and present.

Learning from our mistakes, including grappling with the legacies of slavery, is necessary. Yet, what CRT champions fail to understand is that the scourge of racism is in tension, not harmony, with the universal values laid out in the Declaration of Independence. While America has not always lived up to those values, when it has mattered most, our nation has manned the ramparts of freedom against totalitarian evil while promoting a free and prosperous international order. This is a legacy of which all Americans should be tremendously proud and that should be taught in the classroom.

Great Americans like Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr. changed the world through, not in spite of, the American idea. They could see past the sins of their respective eras to the unlimited potential of our founding principles. Each year, naturalized citizens in Wisconsin swear faith and allegiance to

¹ United States Department of Education. “Proposed Priorities - American History and Civics Education.” *86 FR* 20,348, April 19, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/04/19/2021-08068/proposed-priorities-american-history-and-civics-education>.

² Hess, Rick, Martin, R.J. “Smithsonian Institution Explains that 'Rationality' & 'Hard Work' are Racist.” *Real Clear Policy*, July 20, 2020, https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2020/07/20/smithsonian_institute_explains_that_rationality_and_hard_work_are_racist_499425.html.

these ideas, just as millions of others have across history. With that in mind, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. The original intent of the American History and Civics Education program is to “support efforts to improve the quality of American history, civics, and government education by educating students about the history and principles of the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights.” *The 1619 Project* is heavily disputed by scholars, including a fact checker who contended that her input was totally ignored.³ Its curricular materials encourage students to selectively erase portions of seminal founding documents to make them fit a partisan narrative.⁴ Its architect, Nikole Hannah-Jones, has declared that her deepest goal is to “get White Americans to stop being White.”⁵ She also implies in *The 1619 Project*’s opening essay that Asian-Americans against affirmative action are ungrateful.⁶ Given these red flags, how does *The 1619 Project* represent an improvement in American history education? Do you share Hannah-Jones’ deepest ambition?
2. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi argues, “The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”⁷ Do you agree?
3. Should CRT-influenced history be taught uncritically? If not, which texts would you place in dialogue with it to prompt discussion over their premises and facts?
4. Your proposed rule lauds “identity-safe” practices, citing a book by Becki Cohn-Vargas and Dorothy Steele. Those authors have argued that colorblindness makes students unsafe.⁸ Presumably, the Department of Education prides itself on evidence-based policymaking. Is the Department of Education aware of any studies that suggest treating students equally, regardless of race, endangers them?

We are blessed to live in the greatest nation in the history of the world. It is not a perfect nation, but it is a good nation. American students deserve to love and appreciate their country so that they will be motivated to preserve and protect its best qualities while always striving to improve upon its deficiencies. I urge you to reconsider the proposed grant criteria and ensure that federal funds do not support critical race theory or associated teaching methodologies.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your response.

³ Harris, Leslie M. “I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. *The Times* Ignored Me.” *Politico*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>.

⁴ Pulitzer Center Education. *Activities to Extend Student Engagement*, May 28, 2020, <https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/activities-extend-student-engagement>.

⁵ Hunter, Karen, Hannah-Jones, Nikole, Lee, Trymaine, Williams, Teri. “A ‘1619 Project’ Town Hall.” *The Karen Hunter Show*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF36IQH3BRw>.

⁶ Hannah-Jones, Nikole. “America Wasn’t a Democracy Until Black Americans Made It One.” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>.

⁷ Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York: One World, 2019.

⁸ Cohn-Vargas, Becki., Steele, Dorothy M. “Creating an Identity-Safe Classroom.” *Edutopia*, October 21, 2015, <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/creating-an-identity-safe-classroom-becki-cohn-vargas-dorothy-steele>.

S/F,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'MG', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress