



May 19, 2021

Hon. Miguel Cardona
 U.S. Department of Education
 400 Maryland Avenue, SW
 Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We applaud the Department of Education’s focus on civics education; given the divisions that continue to plague American society, it is critical that our nation’s students receive comprehensive, well-rounded lessons about the political and policy battles that our nation has fought in our ongoing quest to form a more perfect union.

With that in mind, the undersigned organizations wish to express serious concerns with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Proposed Priorities for American History and Civics Education. We believe that as it is currently written, Proposed Priority 1, “Projects That Incorporate Racially, Ethnically, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Perspectives into Teaching and Learning,” creates the very real possibility that under the auspices of this grant program, discrimination will be introduced into classrooms across the country – and accordingly, we ask you to consider rescinding this proposed priority.

As the proposed rule’s background notes, “there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of including, in the teaching and learning of our country's history, both the consequences of slavery, and the significant contributions of Black Americans to our society.” Lest this letter be misinterpreted, it is important to clarify that every signatory to this letter agrees wholeheartedly that American history should be taught more comprehensively, incorporating the breadth and diversity of experiences that have shaped the United States.

The scholarship cited in the Federal Register as exemplary, however, belies a goal beyond merely incorporating “diverse perspectives” into grant applications – and it is to this larger goal that the undersigned groups take umbrage.

The Proposal cites prominent Critical Race Theory proponent Ibram X. Kendi, approvingly quoting his theory of “antiracism” as an example of appropriate K-12 instruction. Unfortunately, the bulk of Kendi’s scholarship advocates for the reallocation of resources and opportunities in American society based on race, and he has asserted that “the only remedy for past discrimination is present discrimination; the only remedy for present discrimination is future discrimination.”¹ As the Department surely recognizes, discrimination has no place in America’s classrooms, no matter the rationale.

In addition, the Proposal highlights the New York Times’ ahistorical and discredited 1619 Project as an “example” of American History instruction that grant applicants should follow. This decision is fundamentally flawed because the 1619 Project is not a work of history under any definition of the term. In fact, the primary author of the project herself admitted that her work was “not a history” of the United States, but an ideological “narrative.”² In addition, the project’s scholarship has been roundly criticized by preeminent historians from across the political spectrum; Victoria Bynum, James McPherson, James Oakes, and Gordon Wood reviewed the project and were “dismayed at some of the factual errors” it contained. They described its contents as “a displacement of historical understanding by ideology.”³ These scholars noted that the 1619 Project’s central claim—that “America’s founders declared the colonies’ independence of Britain ‘in order to ensure slavery would continue’”—is simply “not true,” and that “every statement offered by the project to validate it is false.”⁴ The 1619 Project should not be included in any American History curriculum, and it certainly should not be promoted as a model to be emulated.

The concepts that undergird Proposed Priority #1 are deeply unpopular; according to a nationwide poll commissioned by Parents Defending Education in April 2021, 70% of respondents said it is not important or not at all important for schools to “teach students that their race is the most important thing about them,” while 74% said they were somewhat or strongly opposed to teaching students that white people are inherently privileged and black and other people of color are inherently oppressed. In addition, 69% of respondents opposed schools teaching that America was founded on racism and is structurally racist, while 88% opposed schools assigning white students the status of “privileged” and non-white students the status of “oppressed.”

¹ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019).

² Nikole-Hannah Jones, Twitter, @nhannahjones, July 27, 2020, archived at <https://bit.ly/3hlwAeX> (“I’ve always said that the 1619 Project is not a history.”) (emphasis added); see also Becket Adams, *1619 Project founder claims her project is simply an ‘origin story,’ not history*, The Washington Examiner, July 28, 2020, <https://washex.am/3ybLN8i>.

³ David North & Eric London, *The 1619 Project and the falsification of history: An analysis of the New York Times’ reply to five historians*, World Socialist Web Site, Dec. 28, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3w4JguV>.

⁴ *Id.*

Fortunately, a number of new curriculums have been developed in recent years that better incorporate diverse perspectives into teaching and learning; for example, the Woodson Center’s “1776 Unites” project offers authentic, inspiring stories from American history that show what is best in our national character and what our freedom makes possible even in the most difficult circumstances – maintaining a special focus on stories that celebrate black excellence, reject victimhood culture, and showcase African-Americans who have prospered by embracing America’s founding ideals. Irshad Manji’s “Moral Courage” program provides a unifying alternative to “intersectionality” and related models of anti-racism ideology, facilitating students to grow beyond cancel culture through a no-shaming practice.

In order to protect students’ rights under both the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we request that grants administered by the U.S. Department of Education not be used for instruction that asserts:

- (1) that any race is inherently superior or inferior to another;
- (2) that any individual’s moral character or worth is determined by his or her race;
- (3) that any individual is inherently racist or oppressive—whether consciously or unconsciously—by virtue of his or her race;
- (4) that any individual is “privileged” solely by virtue of his or her race;
- (5) that any individual participates in or perpetuates “systemic racism” by virtue of his or her race; or
- (6) that any individual, because of his or her race, bears responsibility for the actions committed by other members of his or her race.

We wish you success as you work to improve the quality of education for all American schoolchildren – and while we may disagree about specific policies and their implementation, please know that we would welcome the opportunity to work with you and the Department on these important issues in the future, should you be amenable.

Respectfully,

Parents Defending Education
Alliance for Constructive Ethnic Studies
Awake IL
Chinese American Citizens Alliance of
Greater New York
Californians for Equal Rights Foundation
Child Protection League
Civics Alliance
Coalition for TJ
Color Us United
Educators for Quality & Equality
Fair Education

Fight for Schools
Fishers One
Moms for Liberty
National Association of Scholars
New Trier Neighbors
Oregonians for Liberty in Education
Parents 4 Novi Together
Parents Against Critical Race Theory
Power2Parent
Utah Parents United
Wokebusters of Douglas County