

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2021

Admiral Michael M. Gilday
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Admiral Gilday,

We write to express our deep concern over the current reading list provided by the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program. American military personnel, whether commissioned officers or enlisted men and women, take an oath to defend and support the Constitution then go abroad to protect the United States. It is therefore unfortunate, even dangerous, for the Navy to suggest reading material which calls for violating the former and encourages feelings of alienation from the latter. Yet this is what you have sanctioned by recommending sailors read *How to Be an Antiracist*, *The New Jim Crow*, and *Sexual Minorities and Politics*. While we are confident this was not your intent, you are implicitly endorsing books which undermine faith in our nation and weaken unit morale and cohesion.

These books are not mere descriptive works that inform sailors of ongoing controversies in our society and how they work their way through the political process; they are normative texts proscribing views inimical to the patriotic mission our brave men and women undertake. Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* argues that the entire American system is corrupted from top to bottom by racial prejudices which account for all differences in outcomes in our society. Americans must devote all our energies to fighting this system rather than fighting its enemies overseas. Meanwhile, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* claims the U.S. penal system is a new Jim Crow, and made so through a conscious decision by political actors who saw rising crime in the 1970s as "an opening to turn back the progress on racial progress in the United States." Finally, Jason Pierceson's *Sexual Minorities and Politics* decidedly takes a side in debates that are far from settled in our society, such as whether biological men should be able to use the same bathroom as women and girls, and whether they should be able to compete in women's sports, shattering female records and receiving scholarships intended for women. Since the Navy still has separate bathrooms and physical fitness standards for biological males and females, this seems an odd choice to recommend.

All three books reinforce the view that America is a confederation of identity categories of the oppressed and their oppressors rather than a common homeland of individual citizens who are united by common purposes and fidelity to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence codified in the Constitution. These works fall under the rubric of Critical Theory, a radical form of Marxist philosophy which should not be allowed to poison our military. Critical Race Theory, a subset of Critical Theory developed in the 1980s to focus on perceived legal injustice in the United States, traffics in racial and sexual stereotypes and collective guilt, viewing any

differences in outcomes as evidence of system injustice. What exactly such works might contribute to a better Navy is difficult to understand.

These books give neither detached nor balanced descriptions of the controversies in our society, and have no place on a military reading list. They aim to disrupt the nuclear family and call for constitutional violations such as Kendi's advocacy for discrimination by the federal government against Americans according to their race. He writes "**The defining question is whether the discrimination is creating equity or inequity. If discrimination is creating equity, then it is antiracist. If discrimination is creating inequity, then it is racist**" [emphasis added]. Kendi's argument rests on the premise that our nation's founding was inherently racist, including the Constitution sailors swear to uphold.

Does the Navy agree with this sentiment? By recommending this text through a suggested reading list, you are undermining sailors' faith in the very document that binds their allegiance to the people and institutions they protect.

As a Service on the front-line of pivot to the Pacific, such seemingly small (but not inconsequential) actions actively undermine faith in our great American Experiment at a time when, according to the commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the western Pacific theater "is becoming more unfavorable for the United States and our allies." Disrupting the good order and discipline of our naval forces by promoting discrimination displays profoundly and shockingly bad judgment. Why would we expect our nation's young men and women to join the Navy to fight, and possibly die, on behalf of a systemically racist country? Why *should* they if the books you have recommended are taken to heart?

Our national security depends upon a cohesive fighting force that believes in our Constitution and remains combat effective. This requires all sailors to be held accountable to each other equally, fairly, and without prejudice or prejudice. We believe this is an inherent characteristic of service in the Navy, where a ship's success or failure is a function of technical acumen, mental toughness, and competencies at sea of the crew—they live or die as a team. A better use of a reading list would be to focus on these elements of naval service focused on bringing sailors together as a single, cohesive fighting force in pursuit of warfighter excellence, and exclude books focused on a narrowly constructed and disruptive social agenda.

We can seek to improve upon the promise of the Declaration of Independence without teaching our young men and women in uniform that the country they defend is fundamentally racist and bigoted and that the only cure to this corporate deficiency is modern day discrimination. We request you reconsider these three reading recommendations, and make clear your opposition to the message that America is systemically racist. Such books should not be included as required reading nor provided to any students at a Navy training or academic institution. Given the already public release of your reading list, your assurance to this fact is needed. Discrimination is immoral and illegal, regardless of whether or not faddish authors would endorse it.

In closing, to assuage our grave concerns over this development, we respectfully request you: 1) pull these books from the 2021 Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program; 2) verify to us that these overtly political and/or discrimination-endorsing books are not being issued, taught, or otherwise endorsed at any Navy training or academic institutions; 3) confirm that it is not the Navy's official position that America is a systemically racist country; and 4) confirm your opposition to any race-based discrimination, whether it is in the service to "equity" or for any other reason. We look forward to your response.

If you have any questions about the nature of this letter and request, please contact Andrew Braun at andrew.braun@mail.house.gov or 202-225-4422. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,


Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress


Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress