# Naval Academy removes 381 books on diversity in controversial library purge



In a recent development at the United States Naval Academy, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ordered the removal of 381 books from the Academy’s library, citing their connection to topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This move has attracted significant attention, particularly from authors whose works were included in the list of removed volumes.

Among the files purged were books authored by Michael Eric Dyson, a noted professor of African American studies at Vanderbilt University and a prolific writer. Dyson has expressed strong criticism of this decision, highlighting the arbitrary nature of the removal process. He described it as a “sophomoric approach to history by word search,” referencing how keyword filtering was employed to identify and exclude these texts. Dyson pointed to a previous incident within the Pentagon where similar methods resulted in the removal of historical imagery, such as the photo of the B-29 Enola Gay bomber, ostensibly due to the word "gay" in the title.

Dyson elaborated on the complexity of the issues these books explore, underscoring that many of the removed texts do not offer simplistic or dogmatic perspectives but rather provide nuanced and often critical discussions on race, gender, sexuality, and class. For example, Ibram X. Kendi’s influential work, "How to Be an Antiracist," was the most notable on the removal list. Dyson noted that Kendi’s arguments challenge traditional views of racism by proposing a binary framework where individuals are considered either racist or antiracist regardless of their race, presenting a perspective that invites equitable scrutiny across all groups.

Among Dyson’s own works taken from the Naval Academy’s library are “Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America,” which critiques the use of white guilt as a mechanism for social change, and “Long Time Coming: Reckoning With Race in America,” where Dyson offers a sharp critique of cancel culture from a leftist standpoint. Dyson asserts that Secretary Hegseth’s actions reflect a limited understanding, or disregard, for the intellectual rigor present in these books.

He warned against equating the censorship of these texts with an erasure of critical thought, referring to such acts as emblematic of an emerging "fascist imagination" that misrepresents dissent as disloyalty and vulnerable populations as fraudulent. He also highlighted the risk this poses to the broader democratic experiment in the United States.

Despite the purge at the Naval Academy, Dyson points to the resilience of diverse intellectual traditions. He mentions the wealth of literature—from canonical white authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to celebrated Black voices such as James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou—that ensures the continued availability of diverse viewpoints for readers willing to engage with these ideas.

Dyson further recommends community-driven educational initiatives, such as supplementary Saturday schools, to preserve and teach the intellectual heritage that is currently targeted by political moves to restrict curricula. He also underscored the importance of supporting local Black history museums, which serve as vital institutions for preserving cultural memory and knowledge.

Finally, Dyson draws a connection between efforts to limit Black cultural expression and the broader dangers posed by authoritarian tendencies. He describes the suppression of Black voices as a "dry run for fascism," warning that the features inherent in fascist ideology have manifested in efforts to control and oppress marginalized groups. He views the struggle for Black liberty as synonymous with the fight for American democracy itself.

Dyson concluded by expressing concern that while 381 books have so far been targeted, the broader freedom to openly debate and disagree, a cornerstone of democracy, may soon face jeopardy under such restrictive policies. He called on society to uphold an "open book" democracy accessible to all citizens.

The Los Angeles Times is reporting on this matter, drawing attention to the implications of this significant library purge within a key American military institution.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://lambdalegal.org/newsroom/us_20250415_lambda-legal-ldf-urge-naval-academy-reverse-decision-remove-books-from-library/> - Confirms Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's order to remove 381 books related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics from the U.S. Naval Academy's library, highlighting the controversy and listing some removed books such as those by Maya Angelou and James W. Loewen.
* <https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2025/04/05/naval-academny-books-removed-list/6551743899743/> - Reports on the actual removal of 381 DEI-related books at the Naval Academy following orders from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, including mention of notable removed titles like Ibram X. Kendi’s "How to Be an Antiracist" and the timing of the removal before Hegseth's visit.
* <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/03/us/politics/naval-academy-book-removal.html> - Details the use of keyword filtering and the resulting removal of books addressing race, gender, and sexuality, and recounts criticism by Michael Eric Dyson who called the method a 'sophomoric approach to history by word search' and referenced similar censorship in Pentagon imagery.
* <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/04/10/opinion/books-banned-pete-hegseth-and-naval-academy/> - Features commentary from Michael Eric Dyson about the intellectual rigor of the removed books, including his own works like 'Tears We Cannot Stop' and critiques the censorship as a sign of a rising 'fascist imagination' threatening democratic debate.
* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/04/12/community-schools-black-history-museums/> - Supports Dyson's recommendation for community-driven educational initiatives such as Saturday schools and Black history museums to preserve intellectual heritage in response to political restrictions targeting curricula and Black cultural expression.