

To Whom it May Concern

I write with some comments about the Ethnic Studies initiatives for California schools. I want to say from the start that I believe it is extremely likely my comments will be taken to mean something that they do not. What I obviously hope is that they be taken openly and (literally) without prejudice.

1. I do not think that the history of minorities in America can be understood without including the particular history of Jews—or, really, responses to Jews. The point is not that Jews need to be “represented” along with others. It is, rather, that engaging with the history of responses to Jews gets to the heart of the meaning of “race,” “whiteness,” “minority,” “privilege,” and who defines that. Conversely, I believe that leaving out discussion of Jews in America inevitably dumbs down discussion of those issues and, inadvertently, supports racist definitions of race.
2. Here are some questions that may suggest more specifically what I mean:

--In Charlottesville, the Nazi’s chanted, “the Jews will not replace us.” What did that mean and where did it come from? Why the Jews and not other groups? And, at the same time, why have other groups also been represented as “invading” the U.S. and destroying it (i.e, “white ‘culture’”) How do these things go together? How does one help us understand, in a serious way, the other? Within the psychosis that is white nationalism, what is the relationship between these “threatening” groups—and what is the “whiteness” that they threaten?
3. In 1949, DuBois—who I was glad to see figures centrally in the curriculum—wrote an essay in response to visiting the remains, really rubble, of Warsaw in 1949. This had a profound impact on DuBois, causing him to reassess his understanding of the relationships between racism and color. Obviously, if we are to learn from DuBois, we should consider his thinking on this. A link to comment on this is <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/36877/summary> Michael Rothberg, who wrote the relevant article, is at UCLA.
4. Per capita for different groups, Jews are targeted in hate crimes more than any other group. Why is that? Is it a reflection of racism? Preoccupation with “color”? Or what? And, again, how do these things relate to each other in ways that will more deeply inform what they are really about?

That’s a start in the time I have. I hope you will find ways to take such questions to deeper places than I see represented in the curriculum as it stands.

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