



DEPARTMENT OF ETHNIC STUDIES

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February 25, 2021

Tony Thurmond

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State Superintendent, CA Department of Education

1430 N Street

Sacramento, California 95814

Re: UCB Ethnic Studies Department's OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

The Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley, established in 1969, is the first of its kind in a Research 1 institution. Over the past five decades, our faculty members have produced ground-breaking and foundational scholarship that helped define the field of Ethnic Studies. Our contributions have been recognized with awards and fellowships from national organizations (Guggenheim, ACLS, NEH, Ford, and more). Moreover, we have graduated generations of students who have become educators, policymakers, community organizers, cultural producers, and scholars in universities throughout the nation. We write to submit our comments for consideration.

The goal of Ethnic studies is to provide a critical approach to the study of U.S. nation-state formation by addressing the longstanding systemic and structural efforts to exclude and marginalize Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and by uplifting the silenced histories of BIPOC struggles, entanglements, and resilience. Fundamentally, the field of Ethnic Studies offers a corrective to dominant assimilationist narratives that have erased and misrepresented the histories and experiences of BIPOC communities. Because we understand education to be a key site for transformative learning, we believe that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)--or any curriculum on US history and society, for that matter--must provide a critical examination of the complex field of power relations that come to shape BIPOC communities. The ESMC draws its definition of the field from our website, stating that "at its core, the field of ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity, with an emphasis on the experiences of people of color in the United States" (ESMC Ch1 p5). We appreciate the citation. However, we have serious intellectual concerns about the latest version of California's ESMC, and we are troubled by the lack of consultation with the original ESMC writers and experts of Ethnic Studies.

We oppose the current version of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Recent developments call into question the intellectual integrity of the current ESMC. First, the ESMC advisory committee members and all the original writers of the ESMC have withdrawn their names to protest the lack of consultation throughout the revision process and because the current ESMC no longer reflects their collective work. Second, a broad coalition of scholars and university faculty have expressed strong disagreement with the removal of Arab American Studies from the Asian American Studies section of the ESMC. In both cases, our scholarly community has raised serious concerns about the legitimacy of the current ESMC in representing the field's intellectual contributions, principles, values, and pedagogy. It also questions the expertise of the current decision-making body that is overseeing the revision of the ESMC. Upon reviewing the current ESMC, we make the following recommendations.

- (1) Allow experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the expertise, principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Experts should reflect the range of specialization and subfields in Ethnic Studies and should comprise the majority of the decision-making body responsible for the ESMC.
- (2) Reinsert Arab American Studies—including the study of Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. The scholarship of Arab American Studies, beginning with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, has played an important role in the development of Asian American Studies.
- (3) Provide historical context that shapes the different trajectories and relationships of BIPOC communities across time and space. All case studies should be historically situated in order for students to understand the variety of contextual factors that shape the conditions and parameters of change and the dynamic field of contest, collaboration, and struggle. The criteria or logic for selecting case studies should be established by ES experts and their significance should be explicitly clear.
- (4) Attend to the specific concepts of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity to comprehend their distinctive meanings and social impacts. These terms point to different processes of subject making that shape each community's relationship to and position within the United States. For instance, racialization works differently for Black, Latinx, and Asian American communities. Indigeneity necessarily references unique relationships and claims to land and the ongoing struggle between tribal sovereignty and U.S. settler colonialism. We have included in the addendum a detailed review of the Native American Studies curriculum, as an example of the specific concerns that should be considered when developing each subfield curriculum.
- (5) Approve an ESMC that centers the histories, experiences, and knowledge of BIPOC communities and their struggles for liberation and social justice.

An ES model curriculum ought to reflect the knowledge, expertise, and innovations of the field. Accordingly, we call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. Californians deserve a curriculum that carries forth the field's decades-long commitment to social transformation and justice. We urge you to support an ESMC grounded in the visions and promises of our field.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Juana María Rodríguez
Chair, Ethnic Studies Department

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ADDENDUM

UC BERKELEY NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES COMMENTS ON STATE-WIDE ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM

The Native American Studies curriculum is inadequate in several respects. The curriculum as a whole forces Native peoples into the multicultural model as one among many “identities” and neglects fundamental issues that distinguish Native peoples from other social groups. These include distinct political status as nations and unique relationships and claims to land. Additionally, there is no significant attention to the history of Native California people that is essential to understanding current social issues. Nor does the curriculum seem to be based on input from tribal governments, many of which have education departments, or on models created by national Native organizations focusing on education. Although one case study in the curriculum has pressing contemporary relevance (the conflict over the shell mounds), it is presented with little relevant context, and there is undue emphasis on such issues as the mascot controversy, which is also presented without sufficient context.

The historian Paige Raibmon makes an excellent case for the ways in which “inclusive” and “anti-racist” curriculum continues to reinforce ideologies that disenfranchise Indigenous peoples in material, political, and other ways:

<https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2018/09/28/Relations-Indigenous-Peoples-Europeans/>

Here are our specific suggestions and comments:

1. There is no question that sports team mascots and other racist imagery of Native people are pressing issues and *could* be an appropriate case study in the classroom. But taking seriously the harms caused by such images means that educators must think very carefully about the damage that well-meaning study of such racism in the classroom can do in itself by re-presenting and re-traumatizing Native students with these harmful images (for example, by screening the film *In Whose Honor*), even though the point is to critique racism. The psychological research on the effects of mascots on Native people has brought into clear focus the *risks to students* of merely bringing up racist imagery in class--whatever the purpose. For an overview, see Laurel R. Davis-Delano, Joseph P. Gone, and Stephanie A. Fryberg, “The Psychosocial Effects of Native American Mascots: a Comprehensive Review of Empirical Research Findings,” <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1772221>
2. We think that a land acknowledgement *can* be appropriate, but we would urge that it be pursued through contact and relationships with presently existing tribal governments (federally-recognized or not).
3. Shellmound can be a rich lesson, but we are concerned about several critical dimensions that are missing from the lesson plan as written. Shellmound is not just one burial and sacred site, but part of a larger area of more than 400 mounds as well as villages sites, not just Ohlone, but also Coast Miwok, Patwin, and Bay Miwok [see Kent Lightfoot, “Shellmounds: An Archaeologist’s View,” *News from Native California* 17(3):16-17 (2004)]. Shellmound specifically has been complicated because the Muwekma Ohlone do not have federal recognition, and thus do not have the kind of legal authority over territory that federally-recognized tribes do (see comment 4, below). Since there is a long history of K-12 lesson plans oversimplifying Native societies, this lesson represents an opportunity for students to understand

how tribes pursue their goals in the contemporary world of local politics, land-use planning, and the mosaic of county and municipal governments.

4. The one very important lesson plan that we think is fundamental, but is not covered in the model curriculum, is a lesson plan on *existing tribal governments*. The distinctive feature of Native Americans is that they are citizens not only of the State of California and the U.S., but of their own Indigenous nations (or tribes). (For a list of the 109 federally recognized tribes in California, see <https://www.ihs.gov/california/index.cfm/tribal-consultation/resources-for-tribal-leaders/links-and-resources/list-of-federally-recognized-tribes-in-ca/?mobileFormat=0> On unrecognized tribes, see Carole Goldberg and Duane Champagne, *A Second Century of Dishonor: Federal Inequities and California Tribes*, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1996, Chapter 14, “Status and Needs of Unrecognized and Terminated Tribes California Indian Tribes,” <https://www.aisc.ucla.edu/ca/Tribes14.htm>). Native people have a *special legal status* recognized by both the United States and the State of California that includes the right to what is commonly called “tribal sovereignty,” and Indian tribes have a *government-to-government* relationship to both the state and the federal government. Under federal law, Indian tribes are understood to have both a pre-constitutional (originating *before* the U.S. constitution) and extra-constitutional (tribal governments are not controlled by the U.S. constitution) legal status (see David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, fourth edition, Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018, Chapter 2, “Indigenous Peoples are Nations, Not Minorities”). This is the key touchstone for understanding both the history and the current struggles of Native people. It is the basis for their longstanding relationship to the land (their tribal territories), to self-government and self-determination, and to how most Native people see their relationships with non-Natives. The ongoing projects of Native communities to restore their relationships to the land, to revitalize their languages and cultures, to create a better life for their citizens, are best understood in the context of their commitment to tribal self-determination and sovereignty. Most tribal governments have webpages with relevant statements and histories of their tribal communities, which would be an apt place for students to start researching the continuing existence of tribes in California. Another good place for students to conduct research on the internet is the Tribal Communities page on the California Courts website, <https://www.courts.ca.gov/3066.htm>