

- **From:** Jason Ferreira
 Sent: Thursday, August 13, 2020 6:48 PM
 To: Ethnic Studies
 Cc: ; [Emails Redacted]
 Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment regarding Item 2/History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee/Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)
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- Dear members of the Instructional Quality Commission,
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- I am writing to you today in my capacity as someone who not only received his Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from Berkeley, teaches within the only College of Ethnic Studies in the nation, and served as a Visiting Faculty member at Harvard University to participate in a year-long initiative dedicated to the “Past, Present and Future of Ethnic Studies,” but I am also in the process of writing the first social history of the student/faculty strike at San Francisco State that gave birth to the discipline. As part of this research, I have sat and interviewed nearly fifty of the Founders. I share all this biographical information to underscore that I am deeply involved and knowledgeable about what actually is—and perhaps just as important, what isn’t—Ethnic Studies. Nearly three decades of sustained practice within the field lends itself to developing that expertise.
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- First, I urge the Instructional Quality Commission to reinstate the original committee of writers of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum(ESMC) so that actual experts in the field of Ethnic Studies—those who trained in the field, those who steeped in the literature, those who understand its specific pedagogical principles for K-12 educational settings—can make whatever revisions may strengthen the proposal. The notion that individuals without the requisite background in Ethnic Studies would parachute into a policy decision as important as this and remove those with experience and expertise is a problem for, bare minimum, two reasons. On the one hand, our nation is already tragically afflicted with a gratuitous and dangerous politicization of policy decisions that would be better left to the experts. Just as public health experts should be relied upon to deal with COVID-19 decisions and not DC lobbyists or political operatives, so too should Ethnic Studies experts be relied upon when it comes to drafting and re-drafting California’s model curriculum. At the same time, the sidelining of the original committee composed of actual Ethnic Studies practitioners echoes an all-too-familiar feeling amongst people of color of having our experiences and our expertise denied because it makes others uncomfortable. But the avoidance of that discomfort for most of US and California history is precisely why Ethnic Studies is necessary. And these experts are raising important questions and opening up difficult conversations, drawing upon a diverse set of experiences across communities of color, to move our state and nation forward. I am familiar with many of the individuals and have the highest respect for them. So, again, I implore you to reconvene the original committee and allow them to revise the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum in a manner that does not dilute or convert the proposal into something Ethnic Studies is not.

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- Second, I want to say that—again, based upon both my professional knowledge of what constitutes Ethnic Studies (i.e., my training and teaching) as well as my extensive interviews with those who actually founded the discipline (my research), it is vitally important to include Pacific Islander and Arab American Studies within the wider Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. I ask the commission: if those *who do Ethnic Studies* on a daily basis state that they should be included, that they squarely fall within the parameters of Ethnic Studies, why would these groups be removed? Further, if those *who founded Ethnic Studies* are also arguing that Arab American Studies was (and is) part of their broader vision, again, why would these groups be removed? I am fully aware that representatives from Asian American Studies have testified to your commission regarding their support for the inclusion of Arab American Studies. I also know that the Founders have drafted a statement of support and shared their position with you. So, again, why? There are those who would rather close certain conversations, to keep certain communities on the margins, relegate their realities to the shadows. This violates the very principles of a meaningful education, of Ethnic Studies. It reminds me of Senator Tom Cotton's (R-Arkansas) recent—and, quite frankly, cowardly--proposal to ban elementary and secondary schools from drawing upon the *1619 Project*, to shut down any discussion about the enslavement of African Americans and its legacy, because of where such a critical conversation might lead young students. It is an affront to any self-respecting Ethnic Studies educator to dodge the subject of Palestine and the struggle of Palestinians. To remove Arab American Studies from the curriculum, an entire field of study, simply because one objects to such a conversation would be—just as with Senator Cotton and the *1619 Project*--shameful.
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- Truth is, this whole ESMC affair is a teachable moment. It highlights the debates surrounding the meaning and substance of Ethnic Studies. And it foregrounds the question: who has the power to make and reinforce such a decision? On the former, Ethnic Studies is not diversity studies, nor another name for multicultural studies. However, there are those who would make it so. Ethnic Studies explores the intersection of race and power; one might even say race as power. Born out of the Sixties' freedom struggles, the field initially concerned itself with how race and power impacted Black, Chicano, Asian American, and Native American communities while simultaneously attendant to the self-expression and strategies employed by these communities to realize their full humanity within the context of such oppression. This is why it is so essential to include Pacific Islanders and Arab Americans in the ESMC, two collectivities who share similar historical experiences. And, on the latter question—who has the power to make and reinforce the decision?—it will be instructive to all observers and future students of this moment if Black, Brown, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Arab American communities—and the experts within the respective fields—were denied this decision, denied self-determination, because of outside political considerations.
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- Fifty years ago, up and down the state, authorities sought to deny the creation of Ethnic Studies. They argued it was too controversial, that Black Studies and Ethnic Studies rubbed against

established norms and academic cultures. And authorities did not hesitate to use their power—administrative, political, and even the police—to deny Ethnic Studies and educational self-determination. In the end, it took sacrifice and a long struggle to realize this more relevant education. I want to think we've changed, that those who sit on important bodies such as yours have learned the valuable historical lesson from so many years ago: listening to those with the most direct experience, to those traditionally silenced. We shall see. Reinstating the original committee, trusting in their expertise, and assuring the inclusion of Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies into the ESMC would mark an encouraging first step toward getting a meaningful—and real—Ethnic Studies for our youth.

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- Sincerely,

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- Jason

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