

From: Malka Weitman
Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 5:33 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ESMC second field review comments

To the members of the California State Board of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission,

I am commenting on the second draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Thank you to the IQC for removing overtly anti-Semitic material and politically-motivated anti-Israel content that appeared in the first draft, and for toning down far-left ideological language.

Here are my specific comments and suggestions for improving the current draft:

1) The Need for Ideological Balance

For too long American history has been taught exclusively from the point of view of Europeans who settled and immigrated to this land. However, in trying to right this wrong, the current curriculum reverses this perspective with an equally imbalanced one. The model curriculum should move even further away from the Critical Ethnic Studies ideology, which explains the world in simplistic, good versus evil terms: Europeans and whites are oppressors and people of color are victims; tyranny comes from the right, social justice and resistance come from the left; capitalism is bad, Marxist-inspired economic systems are good. This binary thinking pits groups against each other and erases life's messy realities. For example, although it is true that many of our founders owned slaves, they also created a system of government that is a light to the world. While the role of Europeans in the slave trade is beyond deplorable, it is also true that Africans themselves engaged in selling their fellow Africans into slavery. "Transformative resistance" movements may themselves become oppressive. A curriculum that encourages intellectual honesty and critical thinking must be willing to grapple with these inconvenient truths.

2) Inclusion of Jewish Americans

Jewish and other ethnic groups had originally dropped their request to be included in the model curriculum, and agreed to honor the original focus on the four basic groups: African Americans, Native Americans, Latinx, and Asian Americans. However, a unit on Arab Americans was added to the Asian American section at the last minute. Given that the range of ethnic groups has now been extended, I recommend the following:

1) A unit on Jewish Americans should also be included. This is especially crucial now because, although Jews number approximately 2.2% of the US population, they are the targets of 60% of religiously and ethnically motivated hate crimes. According to FBI 2018 data, Jews are more than twice as likely as Muslims to be targeted. 2) The Jewish American unit should speak to positive contributions of Jews to American culture and social justice movements. It should also include the diversity of the Jewish community, including Jews of North African and Middle Eastern origin, and American Jews of color. 3) Anti-Semitism as a form of hate should be included in the curriculum and thoroughly explored. 4) The Arab American unit should make

clear that Arabs are not the only ethnicity in the Middle East and, instead, make reference to the many other ethnicities represented in the region.

3) Chapter 3 Instructional Guidance for K-12 Education, Lines 858-62

Populations Displaced by War and Genocide

“Students can conduct studies of how other populations affected by war or genocide have migrated to the United States....Another example is the effect that World War II and the Holocaust had upon the American Jewish population.”

This paragraph is confusing. Major migration of Jews to the United States occurred at the turn of the 20th Century as a result of bitter oppression and pogroms suffered by Jews in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust did *not* result in mass migration to the US. The US had strict immigration quotas in place which were not lifted even in the face of the Nazi genocide. This unit should also mention the anti-Semitic attitude of Franklin Roosevelt and the American population in general and the case of the St. Louis, a ship of Jews seeking refuge in the US, which was refused entry, thus sending its passengers back to near-certain death in Europe.

4) Chapter 3 Instructional Guidance for K-12 Education, Lines 889-95

“Another theme that can be covered in this type of ethnic studies course is systems of power. Teachers can introduce the theme by defining and providing examples of systems of power, which can include economic systems like capitalism and social systems like patriarchy....”

All economic systems exert power, and have the capacity to become oppressive when unchecked. Change to “...economic systems like capitalism and communism...” to provide students with a more balanced understanding.

5) Appendix A Unit 6 Lines 179-189 Irish and Jewish Americans

“We will examine the differences between the reception of Jewish and Irish immigrants to what it means to be Jewish and Irish now in the twenty first century....Posing questions on who gets to decide those that get to join the 'club' and why. Students will write a paper detailing certain events in American history that have led to Jewish and Irish Americans gaining racial privilege....”

There are distinctions between the racial privilege accorded to Americans of Irish descent and Jews. Irish have fully attained insider status. Jewish insider status is conditional: Jews are not considered to be white or to be inside the “club” by white supremacists and by many other Americans. Jews are still subtly discriminated against in many ways, and not so subtly discriminated against in today’s rising tide of anti-Semitism. Most importantly, this section should make clear that those who target Jews also target people of color and see them in the same outsider light. It should also point out that many Jews are not of European origin and are not considered white from any point of view.

In closing, I appreciate the guardrails that have been put in place to keep ethnic studies free from bias. However, I am aware that it is all too easy for these guardrails to come crashing

down. Individual school districts or teachers may interpret the guiding values and principles spelled out in Appendix B to suit their own ideological preferences. I urge the Board of Education to remain vigilant.

Sincerely,
Malka Weitman