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Assembly California Legislature



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Instructional Quality Commission
CA Board of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Re: Request to Amend the Proposed Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Commission Members:

I write in opposition to the proposed ethnic studies curriculum on the grounds that it:

- Fails to appropriately recognize all peoples' histories, including people of Jewish faith and the history of the Holocaust; or make distinctions among white European Americans whose ethnic experience in America has been extremely diverse.
- Institutionalizes a false and offensive idea that Capitalism is a system of oppression that is used as a tool to subjugate minorities and is linked to white supremacy.
- Draws divisions among students that could lead to social isolation based upon race or perceived/assumed-privilege

I join my colleagues in the Legislative Jewish Caucus in their concern regarding the proposed curriculum's failure to even recognize the Jewish population and omission of one of the most significant persecutions in human history, the Holocaust. I find it difficult to understand why an ethnic people that have been through so much hardship, and continues to be subject to Anti-Semitism (also not defined in the proposed curriculum), has been excluded from this document. It also appears to lump the experience of white European Americans together into a monolith of so called "white privilege." As a person of Irish descent, I can tell you that the history and experience of ethnic Irish Americans, both in the world and in this country was far from privileged. As the review process continues, I strongly urge the Instructional Quality Commission to be fully inclusive and truthful of all ethnic experiences in America.

As to the second issue, the proposed curriculum vilifies Capitalism, the free market economic system that has provided opportunities to Californians for over a century regardless of race. This is done in the Definitions Section of the proposed curriculum, in the Guiding Principles, and in the Studies Course Outline. Within the Definitions Section, the document alleges that scholars are often critical of Capitalism because it exploits Native people and people of color. Further, the proposed curriculum inappropriately places Capitalism on the same line as white supremacy and similarly defines them as systems of power that should be resisted.

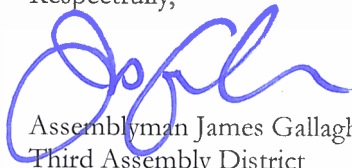
To be clear, Capitalism is an economic system that has provided opportunity to people of all races and creeds and the ability to pursue one's happiness based upon their own individual desire, ingenuity and effort. To draw a correlation between this economic system and the vile and racist ideology that is white supremacy is frankly offensive, in addition to being completely wrong. It has in fact been the most successful economic system in the world in lifting the most diverse group of people out of poverty and subsistence. I strongly urge the Instructional Quality Commission to fairly and accurately depict Capitalism, including the many benefits that it has provided to all people, if it is included in the curriculum.

Ultimately I believe the problem lies in the difference between “Ethnic Studies” the ideological concept that has been developed on college campuses, largely by those with a particular socialist and progressive political bent, and what I believe the general public and the Legislature understands to be ethnic studies. The former is really a political ideology that has no place being taught as fact in a high school classroom. The latter calls for a truthful and objective depiction and discussion of the various perspectives and experiences of ethnic groups, particularly those that may be overlooked in our history books.

Recognizing and understanding different aspects of history and that people come from different backgrounds and live different experiences is an important part of education and ultimately helps bring students together by learning about each other. This proposed curriculum, however, seeks rather to divide students by arbitrarily grouping people into Marxist “haves” and “have nots” based largely on broad, stereotypical statements about the types of privilege different people have solely because of their skin color or sexual orientation. Doing this singles out those people from their scholastic community and, in the case of our youth, I worry that this could lead to social isolation, conflict and division on our high school campuses. I respectfully ask the Instructional Quality Commission re-vamp this curriculum to model a truthful, historical analysis of the various ethnic groups who have contributed to the greatness of our State.

If you have any questions about this request, please feel free to contact me at (916) 319-2003.

Respectfully,



Assemblyman James Gallagher
Third Assembly District