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August 13, 2019

Ms. Soomin Chao
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission, California Department of Education

Mr. Kenneth McDonald, Education Programs Consultant

Re: Public Input on 2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Ms. Chao, Mr. McDonald, and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

I write to you as a university professor whose areas of research and teaching include Ethnic Studies. I have been a member of the Association for Jewish Studies since 1999.

I have reviewed the draft (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmcpubcomment.asp>) and I urge the Instructional Quality Commission to reject it. The draft curriculum was evidently produced by a committee that included members with an extreme anti-Israel bias, and these extremist political views have apparently dominated and have distorted and twisted basic aspects of the curriculum. In my view, this has perverted the important educational and social justice goals of an Ethnic Studies curriculum for California schools. California's Ethnic Studies curriculum could have and should have been a model for other states. Instead the agenda has been hijacked by a group with fringe views, who have instead created a document that has fanned the flames of division and demonization, rather than working to promote respect, understanding, and peace.

I encourage your Commission to form a new committee to produce a new draft curriculum, one that embodies diversity and one which strives to combat all forms of prejudice.

For decades, mainstream scholarship in the field of Ethnic Studies has noted (with all consideration of the unique historical and even political features and the diverging theoretical and methodological issues confronting the various sub-fields within Ethnic Studies and even their tensions with one another) the intertwined conceptual paradigms, pedagogical aims, and institutional development of Jewish Studies alongside fields such as Black Studies; Native American Studies; etc. [See, for example, Thomas J. La Belle

and Christopher R. Ward, *Ethnic Studies and Multiculturalism* (SUNY UP, 1996).] Indeed, within the field of Jewish Studies, scholarly paradigms from other Ethnic Studies fields have long been viewed as models of inspiration and renewal [see Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, eds., *Jews and Other Differences* (Minnesota UP, 1997).] One need only look at how the conceptual model of “diaspora studies” has reciprocally and productively reshaped African Diaspora Studies; Jewish Studies; and a plethora of other approaches to diaspora communities within the field of Ethnic Studies.

Then there is the issue of the study of racism and prejudice, especially in the current political climate, which has seen a disturbing rise in antisemitism; anti-Black racism; anti-Latinx racism; Islamophobia; and xenophobia in general.

It is thus outrageous that this draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum omits any substantive discussion of anti-Jewish prejudice (i.e. antisemitism). Anti-racist organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League have long documented the relation between anti-Jewish prejudice and other forms of racism in U.S. society (see, for example SPLC Senior Fellow Erik K. Ward, <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>). Historians, most recently James Whitman in *Hitler's American Model* (Princeton UP, 2017) have documented ways in which anti-Black racism and antisemitism developed with reference to one another. It is a disservice to the students in California schools, and to future leaders, if the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust is ignored.

It is equally perverse that the American Jewish experience is effectively erased in this Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. While it is admirable that the draft curriculum addresses “Islamophobia” and “Arab American” experience, to do so without understanding these in relation to antisemitism and to the Jewish American experience is an irresponsible distortion. (On the historical relation of antisemitism and Islamophobia, see, for example, Christine Achinger, ed. *Antisemitism, Racism, and Islamophobia*, Routledge, 2015.)

Unfortunately, the bias ingrained in this draft curriculum is too deep to simply be amended at this point. I recommend that a new model curriculum be drafted, by a new commission which includes a broader and more inclusive range of scholarly and pedagogical practitioners from the broad range of sub-fields within Ethnic Studies, and which considers best practices and the full range of community concerns in our complex and diverse society. California has led the way in so many areas of crucial importance in American life; I hope that the Ethnic Studies Curriculum that your office eventually does implement will be another such beacon.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Jonathan Skolnik