

**From:** Marisa Mc Gettigan

**Sent:** Sunday, January 10, 2021 8:46 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comment on Proposed Ethnic Studies Curriculum

To Whom It May Concern,

I write this comment as a graduate of the Mountain View-Los Altos Unified School district and current student of political science at University of California, Berkeley. Through my coursework in high school and college I have taken several American cultures classes which focus on the telling of history from an intersectional perspective of race, class and gender and have become familiar with the basic concepts of critical race and gender theory.

My principal concern with the proposed California State curriculum is that rather than providing students with facts and letting them draw their own conclusions based on the material presented, this new curriculum will present a one-sided narrative determined by the State of California. An ideal curriculum will present history in an accurate manner, holding all individuals and groups accountable for their actions.

I am well aware that writers of history textbooks in the past often did portray a one-sided version of American history by telling stories almost solely through the eyes of the "victors": white men. This resulted in the historical erasure of many of the struggles and stories of other groups, including Native Americans, women and more. I hope writers of this curriculum do not participate in this same type of historical erasure by placing an undue focus on, or giving undue praise to, one group of people, whether that be a certain ethnicity, gender, or disadvantaged peoples as a whole just because of their social identity or status.

I've already experienced the biases of Californian educators in my own high school. In my high school curriculum, we rarely read classic literature. We were never introduced to Homer, Dickens or any of the great philosophers such as Rawls, or J.S. Mill. While I appreciate their inclusion of Steinbeck, Austen, Shakespeare and Alan Paton, the reading and analysis of books like "Beloved" by Toni Morrison was not appropriate. Not only is the description of sex between Paul D. and Sethe completely inappropriate for high schoolers, the entire concept of killing your own baby to prevent it from being a slave and having that baby haunt your house for years is upsetting in a way that is not productive for students so young. In my opinion, schools should try and select literature to present to students that is appropriate for their age and criticizes

immoral acts, rather than viewing them as understandable, or even acceptable in certain circumstances. Schools can certainly teach about how awful slavery and Jim Crow were with literature and media that meets these qualifications such as the song "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. This song criticizes the obviously immoral act of hanging, without tacitly saying other forms of immorality are okay.

Furthermore, I fear that by placing such a substantial focus on people's "social identities", many of which are socially constructed, the new curriculum will divide rather than unify students and give them a "woe is me" attitude if they believe their opportunities are hindered based on unchangeable characteristics. I hope schools will emphasize that character, work ethic and other such values are how we should judge people rather than focusing on race, class et cetera. Even if structural racism, sexism and classism do harm some people's chances of achieving opportunities it is better to focus on what a person CAN change and improve rather than how the attributes God has given them hinder their life chances. Viewing everything from the perspective of race and gender does make these categories less salient, which is the goal. Rather it increases how entrenched these socially constructed categories are in our society.

I wish Californian educators the best of luck in creating and implementing a curriculum that teaches history in an accurate, factual and impartial manner. I hope the students will be able to draw their own conclusions about historical events, rather than just attempting to imitate the conclusions drawn by the teachers. I believe it is possible to build a curriculum that promotes pride and morality among students, rather than undermining it.

Thank you for listening and Godspeed.

Warmly,

Marisa M.