

May 27, 2020

Honorable James Harris, Honorable Mica Smith-Dahl, Honorable Jumoke Hinton Hodge, Honorable Shanthi Gonzales, Honorable Judy London, Honorable Roseann Torres, Honorable Denilson Garibo, Honorable Aimee Eng, Honorable Gary Yee

Dear Oakland Unified School Board Members:

As the matriarchs and founders of Ethnic Studies, we STRONGLY urge you to vote YES on tonight's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for the following reasons. Fifty one years ago, we were among the first group of Third World students to be admitted to the University of California, Berkeley, an outcome of the Third World Strike demands, the longest student strike in UC history. That was the birth of Ethnic Studies courses and departments, working towards the formation of a Third World College, and we, the students at the time, were in the forefront of this historic academic formation of developing a curriculum that would tell our story. Fifty years later, we are still here, united in solidarity with our precious younger generations' continuation in defense of the ESMC draft at the high school level.

Having instituted Ethnic Studies courses in colleges and universities, making them available to those who have come after us, has certainly impacted many of our lives, not only personally, but professionally, as well. As college graduates of color, we know that if we hadn't taken that one Ethnic Studies course in college, or majored in it, we would not have known much about our histories and cultures. With one course, or a few courses, we don't learn everything there is to know, but it clearly has given most of us the knowledge and confidence that we belong in this society and that our predecessors have contributed immensely to the building of our country. We have witnessed firsthand, the pushback at the college and university administrative levels, the systemic hostility, the delays, undermining, cuts, devaluing of our programs and faculty, and especially our students. All this in spite of all the successes and stats proving increased retention and graduation rates at the college level, not to mention the impressive flow of scholarly works, books, literature, that did not exist when we were students. But we knew it would be a natural outcome and benefit to all those who came after. Studies at the high school level make the necessity for exponentially more students to have the opportunity for access to this curriculum even clearer.

How much of the history and culture of those of us who lived in this continent pre-conquest times or of the Third World populations who were shipped here against their wills to build this country is incorporated in our mainstream elementary, middle and high school textbooks? How well do we know our own history and the contributions our ancestors produced to make this country what it is. At what point in the social science books do students learn about the historical racial marginalization, oppressive and dehumanizing conditions found in our Chinatowns, barrios, ghettos, and reservations? Traditional textbook publishers make sure that our stories are dabbled in here and there in the spirit of inclusivity. But there is depth to our stories that never make it into history. This is what motivated us to demand the opening of

educational institutions to our true herstories, cultures, and ongoing contributions to this nation from its inception to the present time. A central part of Ethnic Studies courses is embracing our communities by incorporating community legacies into the curriculum. Oakland's East and West Oakland is rich with history that came out of the Third World Strike and the development of Ethnic Studies. These two historical events gave birth to the majority of community agencies and schools, like the Street Academy, that still operate and provide services to the residents of our vibrant Oakland communities. It's imperative that Ethnic Studies courses continue to give life to and strengthen our communities.

In a recent article titled "For parents of color, schooling at home can be an act of resistance", the author suggests that parents of color can take this opportunity during our shelter in place/distance learning period to teach our children in ways we see fit and offer them counter stories that focus on people who look like us as opposed to having our children forced to learn from narratives written from European or white perspectives. She suggests tracing origins to different parts of the world by having students read anti-colonial and anti-caste activists/authors to impart this knowledge. Unless parents have been exposed to transformative resistance and self-determination during their educational experiences in high school or college, how can parents impart this knowledge to their children? Our suspicions are that those students who have taken Ethnic Studies courses would have that empowerment. Only a few parents from past generations have had this ability. Let's give future generations the knowledge and opportunity to engage their children in these intellectual exchanges.

Furthermore, this year, 2020, marks the 100th commemoration of Women's Suffrage. Public schools throughout the state and nation center white women as the primary leaders of women's rights, as designated leaders in this field, and as role models for all female students, including those of color in academia. We remind you that in the teaching field alone, white women make up over 60% of our K-12 teachers. As descendents of Clan Mothers who proudly call ourselves Chicanas, we assert that only in Ethnic Studies are our women's stories and historical roles given the centrality they deserve given the seniority on this land for millennia.

As you deliberate on this Ethnic Studies Resolution, we urge you to empower our students of color who have historically been marginalized or minimized by traditional curricula. Again, we **STRONGLY** urge you to vote YES to pass the ESMC Resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ms. Maria Ramirez, Professor Emeritus, Ohlone College

Cc: Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell