

**From:** Alexandra Winnik (Student EHS)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 26, 2021 10:30 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Antisemitism in Ethnic Studies Course

To whom this may concern,

Hello, my name is Alex Winnik. I am the student representative at Edison High School for this Ethnic Studies course. It has come to my attention that in your [Appendix A: Sample Lessons and Topics\(DOCX\)](#), you have added some concerning information that I worry is being used in an antisemitic way. The first issue is the term conditional whiteness.

**conditional whiteness** - When a person or group can gain racial privilege by dropping ethnic markers of difference or assertions of belonging to a separate group. A person or a group can become white conditionally, on the condition of not being ethnically or religiously different, assimilating or passing as white.

This definition is creating a "Jewish hierarchy" in a class made for the extermination of racism. Conditional whiteness creates this false Hitler ideology that Jews are somehow superior to other races even though Judaism is not a race. At first I thought maybe this term was going to be used to explain such an old anti-Jewish trope, but it was a false hope when I discovered the same terms "racial privilege" and "conditional whiteness," in other bullet points for the curriculum.

- After the full horror of the Holocaust came to light after 1945, American attitudes gradually changed toward Jews, anti-Jewish prejudice decreased, Jews were less often racialized, more frequently able to assimilate, gained **conditional whiteness**, and began to be **considered white** by American societal standards. While anti-Jewish prejudice became less socially accepted, it persisted.
- Descendants of Jewish immigrants often assimilated and **changed their position on the racial hierarchy from their immigrant parents, gaining racial privilege.**

I have italicized and underlined the word assimilate. I would like to quickly explain that when Jews assimilate to fit in with America's westernized Christian society, does not mean that we then gain any form of "racial privilege." I bolded phrases and terms that hold antisemitic value. As I previously stated, the term "conditional whiteness" creates a false ideology that the Jewish people have it easier than any other marginalized group. It is clear that the definition was not written down in order to help dispel the Jew hatred used in said definition, but instead to enforce it.

It does not make sense to claim that Jews can be "considered white," seeing as not all Jews can look white. This brings me back to when I started to talk about a "Jewish hierarchy." When reading other bullet points, it was clear that this course would be discussing the different ethnic groups of the Jewish people, Ethiopian, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and so on. Anyone who is paying attention will quickly begin to understand that a majority of the Jews who could have "conditional whiteness," would be Ashkenazi Jews, as they come from European descent. This makes it seem as though Ashkenazi Jews have it easier or have "racial privilege" over other Jews.

The second bullet point goes hand in hand with the first bullet point as well as the definition of conditional whiteness. My father and I are descendants from Jewish immigrants. His father, my

grandfather, is a Holocaust survivor born in Warsaw, Poland. His mother is from Argentina. They moved to America before my Father was born, making him first generation American and me second. While we may have assimilated in order to fit in with westernized culture and become more "American," we can still be subjected to antisemitism. Living in Huntington Beach, I have been subjected to many microaggressions and antisemitic remarks, so much as someone on my school's football team telling me that I was going to Hell because I was a Jew. I understand my privilege of having white skin, but being a Jew holds no privilege and the fact that this course says it does is honestly appalling and extremely offensive. The idea that Jews can "become more White," and as the second bullet point put it in not so many words, "become less Jewish," is horrific and an excellent example of how Jew hatred spreads.

If these topics and this definition were not antisemitic, then why is the term *privilege* only used under Jewish learning? By the definition, I would think that anyone of any ethnic group could have conditional whiteness, could they not? No matter how White a Jewish person may look does not mean that when they come face to face with white supremacy, they would not be hurt or even killed. Our supposed "racial privilege" will not save us next to a neo-nazi. Clearly the group of people who have written this curriculum seem to agree that they would never tell someone of a different ethnic group, such as someone who is African American with lighter colored skin that they have "racial privilege," so what makes Jewish people any different?

Next, I would like to discuss some other issues with the section on antisemitism as a whole.

"Lesson Objective (Students will be able to...):

1. develop an understanding of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans (who are also referred to as Arab Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Persian Jews) and differentiate the various identities, nationalities, and subethnicities that make up the Jewish American community;
2. develop an understanding of contemporary antisemitism and identify how the Jewish Middle Eastern American community today is impacted by prejudice and discrimination against them, as intersectional refugees, immigrants, and racialized Jewish Americans; and
3. students will construct a visual, written, and oral summary of antisemitism in the United States using multiple written and digital texts."

Firstly, not all Jewish people live in America. Even though this curriculum is for California, it should recognize that Jewish people live in other countries. The term "Jewish Middle Eastern Americans" has never been used to describe the Jewish people. All Jewish people are Judean, which means we come from the land of Judea (modern day Israel-Palestine), so this terminology is confusing. There are more ethnic subgroups than the ones mentioned. For example, Beta Israeli, Bene Israel, Ashkenazi, Bukharan, Yemenite, and many more. These texts are extremely "America-centric." For example, the U.S. did not get involved in the Holocaust and WWII until after Pearl Harbor and actively turned away Jewish refugees from Europe because they did not want to deal with us.

"1. Tell students "that following expulsions by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Romans in 70 CE from the land of Israel, many indigenous Jews established new homes in the Middle East and beyond forming the Jewish diaspora. In a Jewish historical context, the term *diaspora* refers to Jews living outside of Israel. More broadly, the term diaspora refers to ethnic or religious populations that are

dispersed from modern-day Israel. Today, Jews are a racially and ethnically diverse group that continues to face antisemitism in the United States and in countries around the world.

2. Tell the students that today “they are going to delve deeper into the experience of discrimination, hate, and violence against Jewish Middle Eastern Americans at present while imagining a response to it.

Explain to students that since the 1940s, one-million Jewish refugees from the Middle East, who are also known as Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, fled antisemitic persecution to countries around the world.

3. Today, the US has a population of an estimated 900,000 Jews who descend from Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish refugees from the Middle East including an estimated 250,000 – 300,000 in California. Individuals in these communities have intersectional identities as a result of experiencing prejudice and discrimination as Jewish Americans, as Middle Eastern refugees and immigrants, and some as people of color.”

Secondly, the phrasing "new homes in the Middle East" implies that we did not live in the area permanently before expulsion. Antisemitism did not start nor end in the 1940s. The wording makes it seem that from 70CE to 1940s there were no instances of antisemitism in the world. Only two ethnic subgroups are mentioned in reference to the Diaspora when all Jewish people originally came from Judea. This should be made clear instead of only referencing two groups. Israel is only mentioned twice, once being in the above text, when it is a huge part of Judaism.

"By examining how Jews have been stigmatized as outsiders, sometimes seen as a racialized other, and sometimes have experienced conditional whiteness and privilege, the lesson will address how conceptions of race and labels change over time and place (racial formation), adding another lens to the study of race. The lesson explains how the experiences of Jewish Americans include: prejudice, discrimination, antisemitism, racialization, hate crimes, Holocaust denial, and being targets of white supremacists, and how some Jews have also experienced assimilation, conditional whiteness, and privilege. Communal experiences of persecution and the Holocaust have led to a widespread commitment among Jews to pursue justice and repair the world for all people, and a vigilance against rising antisemitism. Jews are a distinct ethnic group connected by rich traditions, thousands of years of history, ancestry, language, and religion."

Jewish people are the only ethnic groups mentioned in reference to "conditional white privilege." As I have previously mentioned, not all Jewish people are white-functioning/ white-passing. This statement completely disregards Jewish people of color. Additionally, members of other ethnic groups may also be white-functioning/ white-passing. This curriculum singles out Jewish people as being the only "privileged" minority.

- "Jewish Americans have come to the United States from all over the world.
- The Jewish people originated about 3,000 years ago in Southwest Asia, in the land of Israel.
- Jews do not fit neatly into predefined categories and meet the criteria for being both a religious group and an ethnic group.
- Jews are a distinct ethnic group connected by rich traditions, thousands of years of history, ancestry, language, and religion. Jewish American ethnic identity may be expressed through food, language, holidays, celebrations, expressions of peoplehood, remembrances of historical and ancestral experiences, connections to the land of Israel, a commitment to social justice, and cultural elements such as music, literature, art, philosophy that are also part of Jewish life.
- The racial appearance of Jewish Americans is very diverse and can range from light skinned to Middle Eastern to Jews of color, including African American Jews, Asian American Jews,

Latino/a/x Jews, and Native American Jews. Jewish families include multiracial households, and there are diverse appearances both within families and within communities.

- Many Jewish Americans trace their ancestry to Eastern Europe, and their racial appearance reflects this."

Fitting into "predefined categories" and meeting the criteria "for being both a religious group and an ethnic group" is not up for non-Jewish debate nor for them to decide. A person can be ethnically Jewish and not practice the religion, A person can be religiously Jewish and not ethnically, such as people who were not born Jewish and choose to convert. However, Jewish law states that anyone who converts to Judaism is automatically considered a part of the tribe, meaning they are now ethnically Jewish to us, regardless of how ethnicity is determined today. Another point is not every Jewish person has Eastern European (Ashkenazi) ancestry. This erases all other sub-groups, and assumes that all Jewish people are European, which we are not. Also, Judaism is an ethno-religion, not a race as defined by the United States Census (which created modern racial categories). The theory that Jews are European is a common antisemitic trope used to erase our Jewish identity.

- "In the 1930s, growing anti-Jewish prejudice in the US led to the US government's refusal of entry to Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany until 1944 after millions were already murdered.
- Jews often changed Jewish sounding names to avoid discrimination, to assimilate, or for reasons of internalized oppression. Starting with immigrants, and common with actors, this practice of name-changing continues to the present day.
- After the full horror of the Holocaust came to light after 1945, American attitudes gradually changed toward Jews, anti-Jewish prejudice decreased, Jews were less often racialized, more frequently able to assimilate, gained conditional whiteness, and began to be considered white by American societal standards. While anti-Jewish prejudice became less socially accepted, it persisted.
- Descendants of Jewish immigrants often assimilated and changed their position on the racial hierarchy from their immigrant parents, gaining racial privilege."

The claim that American attitudes towards Jewish people changed after the Holocaust implies that American antisemitism ended after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe. In reality, the end of the Holocaust simply allowed for antisemitism in America to change its shape. The United States still has a huge antisemitism problem, and many of us have not assimilated nor will we ever. For example, Orthodox Jewish people who wear traditional clothing are outwardly identifiable as being Jewish. Again the use of "conditional whiteness" erases the identities of Jewish people of color. We are still considered white by many people in American society, and we are not white regardless of American society. Jewish people are not a race and therefore cannot have "racial privilege." Those of us who are white-functioning/white-passing do hold privilege. Again, Jewish people are the only ethnic group referred to as having "racial privilege" in all of the curriculum.

- "White supremacists continue to racialize Jews as non-white. This was evident when the Unite the Right March in Charlottesville chanted "The Jews will not replace us" with "us" referring to white Americans. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews/>
- Jewish institutions continue to be targets of hate crimes, including synagogue shootings in Poway, CA in 2019, and Pittsburgh, PA in 2018.

- Light-skinned Jews simultaneously experience white privilege on the basis of their appearance and prejudice, discrimination, and systematic antisemitism on the basis of their Jewishness.
- Jews of color like all communities of color face systemic racism, and simultaneously face prejudice and discrimination on the basis of their Jewishness."

Synagogue shootings are not the only form of hate crimes against the Jewish people. More recently, it has been "anti-Zionist" (anti-Israel) graffiti on our businesses and places of worship blaming us for the actions of a government 7,492 miles/ 12,004km away that we have no say in as we are not citizens of that country. Anti-Zionism is antisemitism. Zionism is the belief in the right to Jewish self-determination in our homeland, and therefore anti-zionism denies Jews that right. Anti-zionism is not being against the actions of the Israeli government. Anyone can criticize the actions of the government, but being against the country's existence is not okay.

Some issues with the omission of certain things are:

1. Judea, the Jewish homeland, is not mentioned once in the curriculum. Israel is mentioned in relation to Jews twice.
2. Palestine itself is never mentioned and Palestinians are only ever mentioned in the "Asian-American and Pacific-Islander" and "Arab-American" sections. None of their history, nor our overlapping history, is referenced. This is unsettling since prior to 1948, the area was called "British-Mandated Palestine." The curriculum seems to mention other Middle Eastern communities, and leaves out Palestinians. As a people native to the same area, this is unacceptable.
3. Antisemitic conspiracy theories are not mentioned at all, even though the curriculum's claim that Jews are Eastern European supports the antisemitic Khazar theory which is used to deny the Jewish people's claim to the land of Judea.
4. Zionism/Zionist is never mentioned. While we are glad our terminology is not misdefined, it does not give anyone the opportunity to learn the proper meanings as defined by the Jewish people.
5. There are 43 sample lessons in this proposed curriculum, and only two of them are about Jewish people and our history and the issues we still face today.

Lastly, I would like to leave with a quote from this article: <https://jewishjournal.com/featured/327667/jews-have-until-thursday-to-influence-ethnic-studies-curriculum/>

"Nazi curricula taught that in order to usurp white privilege, Jews pretended to be white, hiding in plain sight. "Just as it is often hard to tell a toadstool from an edible mushroom," read a Nazi [children's book](#), "so too it is often very hard to recognize the Jew..." Depicting Jews as imposters and appropriators of privilege — people who pose as something to which they have no legitimate claim — has been a frequent anti-Semitic theme throughout history."

This sounds eerily close to some of the things you have written into the curriculum.

**I am demanding that the definition of "conditional whiteness" is used only in order to explain why it is antisemitic and that the curriculum text that has been pasted into this email be thoroughly changed and/or removed, thank you.**

Sincerely,  
the Alex Winnik