



Analysis and Recommendations for the Third Field Review of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear California Department of Education,

Thank you for your hard work in revising the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). The current draft is a significant improvement over previous ones and we appreciate your openness and responsiveness to public input. While the ESMC is undoubtedly heading in the right direction, we are submitting a new set of analysis and recommendations to address a number of issues that we found in our review of the current draft.

Broadly speaking, we urge you to revise the curriculum to:

1. Remove content that celebrates or glorifies current and historical figures who have promoted antisemitism and other destructive ideas.
2. Define antisemitism in a way that covers all forms of this hatred and reflects the real-life experiences of Jewish students and communities.
3. Ensure all sections and lesson plans align with the standards in Chapter 1 regarding critical thinking and how to teach ethnic studies in a K-12 environment.

We also urge you to reject:

1. Demands to exclude or edit down any definition of antisemitism to the point where it no longer reflects the experiences of Jewish students and communities (i.e. by removing references to the fact that anti-Israel rhetoric can and does sometimes descend into antisemitism).
2. Pressure to favor any single community above others in the Asian American Studies section or any other part of the curriculum. Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Sikhs, and others should be treated equally in the ESMC.
3. Recommendations to reverse changes that encourage critical thinking instead of one sided political agendas in the curriculum. It is crucial to keep, strengthen, and implement guidelines that will help prevent hatred and bias in our schools.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of our detailed recommendations, which you can find in the following pages.

Preface, Page 5, Line 76

The terms “antisemitism” and “Islamophobia” should be defined in footnotes, as racism is earlier in the Preface. It is crucially important to use definitions that are comprehensive and accurately reflect the lived experiences of Jews and Muslims.

- For antisemitism, the following definition should go in a footnote:
 - Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. Examples of antisemitism can be found here: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>
- We recommend engaging with relevant experts and agencies to ensure the curriculum’s definition of Islamophobia reflects the experiences of Muslim communities in California, as the above definition of antisemitism does for Jewish communities.

Preface, Page 7, Lines 127-130:

The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) rightly fought for the just cause of including communities of color in higher education, and at the same time espoused harmful ideas and ideologies in other areas. For example, one of the most prominent leaders of TWLF gave a [speech in 1968](#) in which he, “attacked Jewish people as exploiters of the Negroes in America and South Africa and called for ‘victory to the Arab people’ over Israel,” according to a news report from that period. In [another speech](#) about TWLF, this same leader said, “it is up to us to make the revolution, to break the system, to smash it, shatter it, and destroy it, as brother Lenin said”. Vladimir Lenin was the founder of the Soviet Union, one of the most antisemitic and otherwise oppressive empires in history. TWLF also drew [significant inspiration](#) from Mao Zedong, the communist dictator of China who was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people, as well as [Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Cong](#), whose actions led many Vietnamese people to flee and establish communities in California.

The State Board of Education’s General Principles should be revised to ensure the ESMC educates about the TWLF accurately and in a way that aligns with Chapter 1 of the ESMC. Students should come away understanding that TWLF and other movements can promote good ideas about some issues and destructive ideas about others. The following edit would accomplish this:

- “Include information on the ethnic studies movement, specifically the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). Cover its significance in the establishment of ethnic studies as a discipline and its work in promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education, alongside criticisms of the movement for promoting antisemitism and celebrating communist dictators whose actions led many people from various ethnic groups to flee and establish communities in California.”

Chapter 1, Page 9, Line 189

Related to the recommendation above about TWLF, the following language should be added to the “History of Ethnic Studies” section:

- *It is important to acknowledge that like all movements and institutions, TWLF and the academic field that grew out of its activism have flaws and are subject to criticism. TWLF has been criticized because its leadership at times promoted antisemitism and celebrated oppressive communist dictators like Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh, whose actions led many people from various ethnic groups to flee and establish communities in California. There have also been recent cases where ethnic studies scholars were criticized for promoting antisemitism or glorifying violence against civilians. Acknowledging this reality helps ensure accountability and progress in the field, and by no means erases the positive impact that so many ethnic studies activists and scholars have made on academic institutions and society as a whole.*

Chapter 1, Page 13, Lines 267-271

In order to align with the sections that come immediately before and after the Guiding Values and Principles, these lines should be revised to read as follows and changed everywhere this language appears throughout the curriculum:

- *examine past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice, equity, and democracy, and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic racism society that promotes collective narratives of critical hope and radical healing.*

It is particularly critical to remove the term “transformative resistance”, or at the very least clearly define it. The term “resistance” can be interpreted in dramatically different ways, meaning anything from nonviolent protests against injustice to terrorist attacks against civilians. We have unfortunately seen this play out recently within the field of Ethnic Studies. At San Francisco State University, a program within the College of Ethnic Studies [planned an event](#) called, “Gender, Justice, & **Resistance**: A conversation with Leila Khaled.” The purpose of the event was to glorify Khaled, who is a member of the PFLP, [a U.S. designated terrorist group](#). She was personally responsible for a plane hijacking that nearly ended in the mass murder of 148 civilians, and frequently uses rhetoric about Israel that promotes violence and crosses the line into antisemitism. The organizer of the event, Professor Rabab Abdulhadi, is cited in Line 2275 of Appendix C of this ESMC draft.

Chapter 3, Page 10, Lines 205-217:

It is very important for this section to include clearer guidance about the role of educators in student community engagement projects. [LAUSD’s ethnic studies instructional materials](#) include valuable guidelines that should be incorporated:

- *“An ethnic studies course should provide students with depth of understanding in relation to ethnic and social issues, rather than promoting specific political activism, demonstration, protest or the like. Ethnic studies is a scientific inquiry of ethnic groups and their interrelations (Yang, 2010, pg. 14).”*

- “An Ethnic Studies course:
 - Should include examples of civic engagement (e.g., voting and other peaceful social justice activities) and the impact they have had on United States history. Students who are considering volunteering, social justice activities, community engagement, etc., should consult with their school teacher/advisor and parents/guardians to evaluate that the activities are lawful, peaceful, and nonviolent.
- “Whenever possible, should [create] opportunities for participation and for reflection on the responsibilities of citizens in a free society” (History Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, 2016, p. 19).”

Chapter 3, Page 23, Lines 565-566

We are slightly changing and simplifying a previous recommendation we made, because Mizrahi Jews are not the only Jewish population that has immigrated from the Middle East to California (i.e. Sephardic Jews, Israeli Americans who are not Mizrahi, etc). These lines should be revised to read as follows:

- Such as Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Coptic-Christians, Iranians, Jews, Kurds, and Yazidis;

Chapter 3, Page 31, 778-807

It is essential for each unit and lesson plan to also be founded on the following principles from Chapter 1, which should be added to this section and all other areas where the “Guiding Values and Principles” and “outcomes” appear.

- Diverse perspectives within an ethnic group should also be taught to avoid reducing a group to a single story. In order to do this, teachers should trust students’ intellect and teach them to think critically, understand different and competing perspectives and narratives, and encourage them to form their own opinions. Care should be taken to ensure that (1) teachers present topics from multiple points of view and represent diverse stories and opinions within groups (staying within the realm of inclusion and humanizing discourse), (2) teaching resources represent a range of different perspectives, and (3) lessons are structured so students examine materials from multiple perspectives and come to their own conclusions.
- In K–12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically, and form their own opinions.
- Curriculum, resources, and materials should include a balance of topics, authors, and concepts, including primary and secondary sources that represent multiple, and sometimes opposing, points of view or perspectives.
- Students will actively seek to understand, analyze and articulate multiple points of view, perspectives and cultures.

- The instruction, material, or discussion must be appropriate to the age and maturity level of the students, and be a fair, balanced, and humanizing academic presentation of various points of view consistent with accepted standards of professional responsibility, rather than advocacy, personal opinion, bias or partisanship.

The above changes should also be reflected in the Sample Lesson Template that starts on Line 1040.

Chapter 3, Page 36, Line 917-918:

These lines should be broadened to be more representative of California's diverse Jewish immigrant communities. The following language is an example of how to do this:

- Historical examples include the population of Armenian Americans that settled in California in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, the effect that the Holocaust, persecution in the Soviet Union, and oppression by Middle Eastern governments had on the American Jewish population, and the Southeast Asian Refugee Crisis.

Appendix A, Pages 6-9, Lines 136-228

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Appendix A, Page 16, Lines 372-380

Related to the previous recommendations about TWLF, the following language should be added

- Begin the lesson by defining what social movements are and how they start. Introduce the history of the Ethnic Studies Movement and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strike to students. Include in the introduction/overview pictures and brief video clips of San Francisco State College students protesting. Throughout the overview, highlight that the Ethnic Studies Movement was successful due to unity and solidarity building, as well as drawing on momentum from other movements that were happening simultaneously, like, the Black Power, American Indian, Anti-war, Asian American, Chicano, United Farm Workers, and Women's Liberation movements. Also include that in addition to being celebrated for making higher education more inclusive of marginalized communities, TWLF has also been criticized for various reasons. These include the fact that its leadership at times promoted antisemitism and celebrated oppressive Communist dictators like Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh, whose actions led many people from various ethnic groups to flee and establish communities in California.

Appendix A, Pages 40-51, Line 890-1152 and Pages 310-316, Line 6442-6590

Sample Lessons 6 and 28 should be substantially redesigned in order to align with the standards in Chapter 1. The purpose of these lessons is for students learn “how we should challenge white supremacy today” from specific historical figures, and examine how those figures contributed to “the movement for racial and economic equality.” Among the figures listed are:

- Angela Davis, an activist and academic who [smeared](#) political prisoners in the Soviet Union as “trying to undermine their governments”, [falsely claimed](#) that oppression against Jews in the Soviet Union was “totally blown out of proportion by the bourgeois press,” and [embraced](#) East German dictator Erich Hoeneker.
- Fred Ho, who was a [Marxist-Leninist](#) (an ideology which led to the death and oppression of millions of people) and [reportedly attacked](#) the Jewishness of a Jewish musician.
- Yuri Kochiyama, an activist who [praised](#) Chairman Mao and Osama Bin Laden.
- Ralph Nader, who has [said](#) that “Jews do not own the phrase anti-Semitism” and that “anti-Semitism against Arab-Americans is a serious problem and, of course, it’s much more serious around the world.” This is a distortion of the term “antisemitism”, which has always specifically referred to hatred and discrimination against Jews.
- Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who has been [widely criticized](#) for multiple antisemitic comments.
- Activist Linda Sarsour, who has a long record of antisemitic [actions](#) and [statements](#), close ties to infamous antisemite and homophobe [Louis Farrakhan](#) and his [organization](#), and facing [criticism from fellow activists](#) for leading Women’s March Inc. in ways that were, “detrimental to the movement.”
- Jack Shaheen, who [accused](#) Israel of manipulating Hollywood in a way that mirrors antisemitic slurs about Jews controlling Hollywood and the media.
- Helen Thomas, a prominent reporter who made widely reported [antisemitic comments](#) towards the end of her career.

- Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, who has been widely criticized for [antisemitic comments](#) and [working closely](#) with [hate groups](#).
- Reies Tijerina, an activist who “turned many previous supporters away as he moved toward a singularly novel, but unmistakable, anti-Semitism,” according to the [New York Times](#).

While it may be legitimate to **teach about** significant current or historical figures who promoted components of white supremacy (i.e. antisemitism) or other destructive ideas, it is not legitimate to frame those figures in positive or celebratory terms. The lesson should be revised to either:

- Remove figures who have espoused such ideas.

OR

- Require students to grapple directly with the flaws of these figures. This would include moving the language from lines 928-934 under “Other considerations” to the “Essential Questions”, and revising the “Essential Questions” from lines 890-898 and 1143-1150 as follows (along with corresponding changes to Lesson 28):
 - What were the upbringing, class background, life experiences, and decisions made by the figure?
 - Was this figure an important person in the movement for racial equality? Did their leadership and achievements challenge racism and other forms of oppression?
 - Has this person been criticized for promoting harmful ideas or are they controversial in some other way? Why would some people have strong negative feelings and others have strong positive feelings about this figure?
 - Can we learn from this figure about how we should challenge racism and other forms of oppression today?

Additionally, many of the figures above are widely known for taking a side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as are the figures below.

- Philip Hitti was a [staunch opponent](#) of Israel being created.
- Edward Said was an advisor to the PLO and Yasser Arafat. He equated Zionism and Israel with colonialism, erasing 3,000 years of Jewish history, identity, and rights in their ancestral home.
- Eduardo Galeano has promoted extreme [anti-Israel narratives](#) and [demonization](#).
- Alia Shawkat [supports](#) cultural boycotts against Israel, which have been widely condemned as harmful to artistic freedom and the free exchange of ideas.
- Grace Lee Boggs [promoted](#) the campaign for cultural and academic boycott of Israel, which has been condemned by hundreds of universities as a violation of academic freedom.

- Rigoberta Menchu [supports](#) BDS

In some cases, such as Edward Said, Philip Hitti, Linda Sarsour, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar, their opposition to Israel is central to their legacy or current work. In light of that fact, the lesson should be expanded to include figures prominently known for having a different perspective. The following changes could accomplish this:

- *Sample Lesson 6: Important Historical Figures Among Marginalized Communities*
- Add a section titled *Jewish American Experience*, including the following figures:

- *Bella Abzug*
- *Rabbi Angela Buchdahl*
- *Louis D. Brandeis*
- *Elan Carr*
- *Jerry S. Cohen*
- *Ruth Bader Ginsburg*
- *Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser*
- *Andrew Goodman*
- *Tiffany Haddish*
- *Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*
- *Anna M. Kaplan*
- *Emma Lazarus*
- *Clara Lemlich*
- *Julius Lester*
- *Alejandro Mayorkas*
- *Golda Meir*
- *Raquel Montoya-Lewis*
- *Henry Moskowitz*
- *Daniel Pearl*
- *Letty Pogrebin*
- *Rose Schneiderman*
- *Michael Schwerner*
- *Bari Weiss*
- *Elie Wiesel*

- Add the following figures to “International Experience”

- *Bernard-Henri Levy*
- *Albert Memmi*
- *Hannah Senesh*
- *Natan Sharansky*

Appendix A, Page 475, Lines 9964-9969

The language in these lines is imprecise because many Jews, Christians, and others who live or have lived in Arab countries do not identify as Arab. For example, many Jews who fled or were expelled from these nations identify as Mizrahi and/or Sephardic Jews, rather than Arabs or Arab Jews. Similarly, many Coptic Christians have an identity that is distinct from the Arab majority in Egypt. Many non-Arab minority groups have faced systemic discrimination and efforts to erase their cultures and identities by Arab governments, so this is an especially important point in the context of an ethnic studies curriculum. The following language would be more accurate:

- *For example, “Arab American” can refer to individuals with roots in 22 Arab countries. These countries are located across land stretching roughly from northern Africa through western Asia, which in itself suggests a far greater range of diversity than a single experience. Contrary to popular representation, not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs—or Arab Americans—are Muslim (many are Christian, for example). Furthermore, numerous minority communities who live or have lived in Arab countries have unique identities that are not Arab (i.e. Coptic Christians, Mizrahi Jews, Kurds, and many more).*

Appendix A, Page 447, Line 10025-10027

This should be edited to acknowledge the fact that antisemitism can also come from the far left and Islamist extremist groups, in addition to far right white nationalism:

- *It has also been interwoven at times with far right movements like white nationalism, far left ideologies, Islamist extremism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.*

Appendix A, Page 485, Line 10214

JIMENA has requested that this lesson plan be included in the Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies section of Appendix A. This request should be honored, particularly if lesson plans about other West Asian populations are added to that section.

Appendix A, Page 490, Line 10340-10342

The video from CNN only covers one form of antisemitism coming from the far right. While this is crucial and should remain, the original version of the lesson had videos that offer a broader perspective and should be added back in:

- *CNN, Has antisemitism returned with a vengeance?*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJQ3x9YDiYE>
- *The Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, Sephardic Jews and Race in the United States*
<https://www.facebook.com/1035425769826632/videos/276470430095418>
- *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Antisemitism Today.*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buCHObBiTY4&t=11s>
- *Coursea, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.*
<https://www.coursera.org/lecture/antisemitism/the-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion-DIOkx>

Appendix A, Page 491, Lines 10364-10375

Links to the two definitions of antisemitism should be added back in to ensure educators have easy access to additional information and context.

- According to the **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**, the world's leading organization committed to stopping the defamation of the Jewish people antisemitism is, "The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews."
<https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>
- According to the **International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)**, the only intergovernmental organization mandated to focus solely on Holocaust-related issues, "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

Appendix A, Page 504, Lines 10615-10616

The definition of antisemitism that was originally submitted should be included in full. The edited version removes crucial context that is essential for students to fully understand antisemitism. This is the original definition that should be restored:

- **antisemitism** - Hatred, discrimination, fear, and prejudice against Jews based on stereotypes and myths that target their ethnicity, culture, religion, traditions, right to self-determination, or connection to the State of Israel.

Appendix A, Page 515, Lines 10851-10859

This language is inaccurate, as it erases the identities of minority groups who live or have lived in Arab countries and may speak Arabic (among other languages), but do not necessarily identify as Arab. Such populations include Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Amazighs, Assyrians, Yezidis, and more. Many of these groups have faced systemic discrimination and efforts to erase their cultures and identities by Arab governments, so this is an especially important point in the context of an ethnic studies curriculum. Additionally, there are no longer large populations of Jews in Arab nations due to historic discrimination and violence against them. The following language would be more accurate:

- Today, Arab is used broadly to describe any person from a nation where Arabic is the main or one of the main languages, for whom Arabic is one of their primary languages, and who identifies as Arab.

While Arabs are ethnically diverse, they do share some common bonds aside from language. Arabs are generally practitioners of Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (in addition to many Jews and Christians from Arab countries who have distinct cultures and do not identify as Arab). The predominant religion of most Arab nations is Islam; however, there are also large populations of Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and there were large Jewish communities in the past as well. There are also some similarities in cultures, social structure, and cuisine, although each nation is unique.

Appendix A, Page 530, Lines 11181-11182 and 11352-11353

This link includes content that denigrates Jews and Armenians. It should be removed or at the very least accompanied by a disclaimer noting the bigoted rhetoric contained within.