

Response to Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)

ESMC Third Review

Re: Appendix A: Sample Lessons and Topics (version: December 2020)

1. The curriculum discusses Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews as Jews of Color. Additionally, on page 488 rows 10311-10312, the curriculum states “students will conduct research on antisemitism (past and present) of Mizrahi Jews in the United States through primary and secondary sources”.
 - a. American Jews are not taught to differentiate themselves by their geographical origins (Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Sephardic). These are accurate sub-designations, but these differences are not self-imposed generally speaking as it relates to the interpersonal relationships between all Jews. This ethnic studies curriculum highlights these categories in a dangerously isolating way that serves to isolate the “white” Jews from anyone else. On page 495 rows 10410-10412, the text states that “Jews are a distinct ethnic group connected by rich traditions, thousands of years of history, ancestry, language, and religion.” This is accurate, and the differences in geographical origins stem from this history whereby Jews were forced into fragmentation. Yet, it shows the short mindedness of this curriculum when it then decides to explain Jews not as a unified group of people but as different types of Jews fragmented by origin.
2. On pages 497-498 rows 10476-10482, The curriculum sites a single YouTube video of one Jew’s “intersectional identity, being a Jewish gay African American, and about Jews of color” as a form of reference and justification for the curriculum’s self-imposed choice to fragment the Jewish people.
 - a. This is a deliberate decision by those who crafted this curriculum to use an anecdote of a single person to fit an intersectional narrative. The text suggests just above on page 495 rows 10419-10420 that it should be a learning objective to “understand the varied intersectional identities of Jewish Americans and how Jews see themselves.” The very phrasing of the question implies that Jewish Americans are self-fragmented into intersectional identities. Again, this is leading and in reality short sighted because American Jews themselves do not focus on intersectional self-designations. This seems to, again, encourage a narrative that is premature. Even if it were true without any doubt, it is contradictory to assume intersectional sub-identification but then instruct students to discover how Jews view themselves.
3. On page 499 row 10513, there is a designated question for students to answer that asks “When, how, and which Jews have experienced racial privilege?”
 - a. “Conditional White” Jews are the ONLY group within this entire text that suggests they have ‘privilege’.
 - b. Notice within the discussion on “Jews of color” how students are advised to perform research of “Jews of Color”, yet the same suggestion is omitted when discussing “conditional white” Jews. This is a glaring example of teaching bias that leads students directionally in their understanding in a dangerous, isolating way.

*please excuse any grammar errors, as these may have been overlooked due to the feedback deadline

4. On page 502 rows 10572-10573, the text states “Many Jews with light skin identify with the idea of white-presenting, which recognizes the divergence between external classifications and internal identity.”
 - a. For whatever reason, the way in which this is written omits the validity in Jews identifying as “white-presenting”, which by omission misrepresents why some Ashkenazi Jews self-identify. The issue has everything to do with the idea that it is insulting to tell a light skinned Jew that he/she is, in fact white (in efforts to label that Jew as a “privileged” Jew) because our non-whiteness is one of the reasons why genocide was waged on European Jews during World War II.
 5. On page 502 rows 10575-10576, the text deliberately isolates the Mizrachi Jews as the type of Jew that is racially diverse. It then omits this from the other mentioned Jews, which is even contradictory to phrasing already mentioned within the document that states Jews as a collective people are racially diverse.
 - a. Why is there a deliberate choice to both claim that only one type of Jew is diverse and indigenous to some area? Only for the conditionally “white” Jew are these designations completely omitted.
 6. On page 503 rows 10597-10599, the text states “Jews are a part of a Jewish American community ... by throwing their lot in with the Jewish people through conversation”.
 - a. What does this even mean?
 7. On page 504, the definition of conditional whiteness reads “when a person or group can gain racial privilege by dropping ethnic markers of difference or assertions of belonging to a separate group.”
 - a. The way this is written, using the specific verb choices, imply that a Jewish person goes about their life wearing some magic cloak of protection whereby when we sense a threat of being labeled with white privilege we then sheepishly conceal our identity by morphing into something else. This is demonstrably disgusting and is libelous.
 8. On page 504 rows 10620-10621, the text states “In US immigration and naturalization law from 1989 to 1941, Jews were categorized as a part of a “Hebrew race.” This racialization deemed Jews as non-white.”
 - a. The deliberate choice to both bring this historical fact up at all and to then put “Hebrew race” is cowardly. It serves to delegitimize any possibility for anyone to see American Jews as a collective people.
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Overall, this is a shameful display of your means to educate children about American Jewish Ethnicity. Additionally, it is concerning that within The Model Curriculum (preface), there does not seem to be a single Jewish member of 17 mentioned that are responsible for leading this initiative. However, I’m not going to assume this outright, because I would then be committed the same acts of negligence, of which this curriculum is guilty. It is understood that this is to be applied broadly to the State of California’s public education network. However, in instances where there is a high level of diversity within a county, you need to reflect on why there is so much time being spent on telling people what to believe and not encouraging the students to learn about the richness of diversity through interpersonal relationships and dialogue.