

From: Gilbert Sewall
Sent: Tuesday, August 13, 2019 10:27 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Comment by Gilbert T. Sewall

Gilbert T. Sewall is director of the American Textbook Council.

Radical Indoctrination: Coming to a Public School Near You

By Gilbert T. Sewall • August 12, 2019

Last week, the Hoover Institution's Williamson Evers admirably aired in the *Wall Street Journal* a disturbing Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum proposed by the California Department of Education and its Instructional Quality Commission, now under view. "It is difficult to comprehend the depth and breadth of the ideological bias and misrepresentations without reading the whole curriculum—something few will want to do," Evers concluded.

Americans should, even so, since curriculum projects such as these are sensitive zeitgeist barometers. Focused on the model curriculum's blatant anti-capitalism, the *Journal* did not add that California is getting ready to mandate an unprecedented ethnic studies requirement for high school graduation based on this extraordinary syllabus. It reflects a revolutionary storm sweeping through educational leadership in the nation's legislatures and metro school districts.

That means that to get a high school diploma, starting in 2024, California students by law will have to complete three courses in English and social studies, two in math and science, and one in arts or world languages. A bill adds to these core requirements "a one-semester course in ethnic studies based on the model curriculum." Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento, Oakland, Stockton, and other minority-rich school districts in the state have already established Ethnic Studies graduation requirements or programs.

According to the model's overview, Ethnic Studies is the "disciplinary, loving, and critical praxis of holistic humanity." It is the study of "intersectional and ancestral roots, coloniality, hegemony and a dignified world where many worlds fit." It "critically grapples with the various power structures and forms of oppression, including, but not limited to, white supremacy, race and racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, islamophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia." The overview promises that the course of study will:

- critique empire and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression at the intersections of our society;
- challenge imperialist/colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on the ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels;

- connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels.

“The foundational values of Ethnic Studies are housed in the conceptual model of the ‘double helix,’” the text professes, “which interweaves holistic humanization and critical consciousness.” The proposed course of study, while promising to help with the “eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism” and the promotion of “socio-emotional development and wellness,” seems intended mainly to stir ill will and delegitimize the nation’s white majority. The conviction that malign U.S. wealth and power exist at the expense of certified underdogs undergirds the entire document.

The sample lessons and courses feature often well-worn subjects with a partisan cast: redlining, resistance to mass incarceration, decolonizing your diet, undocumented immigrants, the black LGTBQIA experience, police brutality, Occupy Wall Street, Indian burial sites, El Salvador, the United Farm Workers movement, and much more. Cleveland’s Chief Wazoo and the Tomahawk Chop segue into studies of colonialism, disenfranchisement, and hegemony.

One bizarre lesson called “Hip-hop as Resistance” professes to demonstrate “how Hip-hop can be used to resist oppression and counter hegemonic beliefs perpetuated through the media,” while “introducing students to Arab-American Hip-hop.” It pledges to help shatter Muslim stereotypes: “fundamentalists, extremists, militants, fanatics, terrorists, cut off hands, oppress women, jihad as ‘holy war’,” or of Palestinians wanting to “blow up airplanes,” “destroy Israel,” and “drive the Jews to the sea.” (Actually, critical thinking about jihad and Islamic intolerance in classrooms and elsewhere is labeled Islamophobia, an evil that merits a separate lesson in the syllabus.)

The curriculum positions itself as the study of “borders, borderlands, mixtures, hybridities, *nepantlas*, double consciousness, and reconfigured articulations, even within and beyond the various names and categories associated with our identities. People do not fit neatly into boxes, and identity is complex.”

Well, *nepantlas* certainly provide the text with an exotic frisson; *hybridities* and *reconfigured articulations* are estimable postmodern confections. A blur, a mix, a fluidity of standards—this is where the curriculum’s line of thought is trying to go—no hierarchies, no standards of quality, and certainly none that are drawn from the Western canon and its humanities.

The California course of study claims that “an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate myths and stereotypes applied to the group by its oppressors.” Such “internalized oppression means the oppressor doesn’t have to exert any more pressure, because we now do it to ourselves and each other,” while the afflicted “experience mistreatment interpersonally from members of the dominant group.” The document makes no effort to hide its political intent or animus. “The teacher can include an extension activity so that students can contact a local politician or ACLU to make their voices heard on issues of immigration policy,” one lesson advises.

The politicization of classroom content is not new, just intensifying. In 1989, the New York state-endorsed “A Curriculum of Inclusion” indicted “Anglo-Saxon norms” and “deep-seated [white] pathologies of racial hatred.” It contended that the “Eurocentric” guidelines previously adopted by New York state projected “dominant European American values.” Thus “the monocultural perspective of traditional American education restricts the scope of knowledge because of its hidden assumptions of ‘white supremacy’ and ‘white nationalism.’” A decade later, a National Council of Teachers of English resolution condemned standard curriculum content because it tended to “reproduce the dominant culture rather than questioning and transforming it.” The NCTE advised resistance to “racism, sexism, homophobia, Eurocentrism, the privileging of English, economic injustice, and other forms of domination.”

Today, militant educators—using identical language—claim the same “invisibility” and “white bias” that they did 30 years ago. Having guaranteed rights in remarkable ways to slaves, women, and immigrants, victorious over fascism and having won the Cold War, then having re-written national and world history to be more “inclusive” and less “triumphalist,” the American nation nonetheless remains a land of unrelieved oppression, bigotry, and hate crimes.

California’s powerful Jewish community is furious with what’s on display. The model curriculum pointedly omits anti-Semitism as a subject and Jews as an ethnic group worth study. Moreover, it takes an openly anti-Israeli view of the Middle East. “This is nothing more than an attempt by fringe activists to hijack the model ethnic-studies curriculum for California high schools in the service of radical political goals,” fumes Seth Brysk, the Anti-Defamation League’s regional director, not used to being on the wrong side of the virtue equation. Ethnic studies militants in Sacramento evidently lump Jewish Americans inside the icy cavern of White Privilege.

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum reminds readers that “cultures, hxrstories, and social positionalities are forever changing and evolving.” In other words, it’s our turn, our hxrstory now.

Reviewing panel reports, curriculum proposals, and humanities textbooks for three decades, I’ve watched multiculturalism’s ambitions rise from “a place at the table” to demands for absolute content and conscience control. The prospect of a state-decreed high school graduation requirement in ethnic studies openly abandons teaching and learning in favor of political indoctrination.