

CALIFORNIA CHAMBER of COMMERCE



September 29, 2020

Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division
1430 N Street, Suite 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

To Members of the IQC:

California Chamber of Commerce (CalChamber) and California Foundation for Commerce and Education (CFCE) are pleased to present comments on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. CalChamber is the largest and oldest business organization in California, representing more than 14,000 businesses of all sizes throughout California, comprising one-quarter of all private sector jobs, in every industry and economic sector. CFCE is a 501(c)(3) think tank affiliated with CalChamber. Our members are deeply affected by and concerned with changes in state education policy, especially as it may influence the preparation of a skilled workforce and the promotion of economic opportunity and social cohesion.

We acknowledge that the curriculum and supporting materials have been substantially narrowed since the first version was distributed for public comment in 2019. However, we still have a profound concern with how the materials characterize – actually, mischaracterize – capitalism and the role of free markets in our society and democracy. Though the references may seem minor compared with other issues in the materials, the sentiments that underlie this usage are inimical to understanding our economy and political system. [For example,](#)

Example 1

Chapter 1, Introduction and Overview

Page 9. Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies.

- “4. critique empire-building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, **racism** (fn.17) and other forms of power and oppression.
(17) As well as patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, **capitalism**, ableism, and anthropocentrism.”

Example 2

Chapter 3: Instructional Guidance for K-12 Education

Pages 18-19. African American Studies.

“Ultimately, this course considers the development of Black identity in the United States and explores the importance African Americans played in the formation of the United States, the oppression they faced, the exploitation of black labor within capitalism, and the continued fight for liberation.”

Example 3

Pages 32-33, Sample Theme #3: Systems of Power

“Another theme that can be covered in this type of ethnic studies course is systems of power. Teachers can introduce the theme by defining and providing examples of systems of power, which can include economic systems like capitalism and social systems like patriarchy. These are structures that have the capacity to control circumstances within economic, political, and/or social-cultural contexts.

These examples betray a lack of understanding of what capitalism is – and is not.

The contextual framework of the model curriculum¹ and the course outlines² is “critical race theory,” so its frame of reference is power dynamics. The curriculum does not appreciate that capitalism is not a top-down system consciously created and controlled by a few powerful plutocrats and manipulated by its creators for their own material ends. It is a marketplace involving millions of buyers and sellers involved in millions of daily decisions.

Capitalism – or more accurately, the free market – isn’t a “system” or a conscious construct. It is not created by government or imposed by an Act of Congress. It is nurtured by fundamental attributes of our Republic, such as the rule of law, and it is bound by political consensus in the form of regulations and taxes. The predominate means by which power is manifested in this economic system is through choices by legislatures to regulate or tax commerce and individual economic decisions.

¹ “Teachers and administrators should familiarize themselves with current scholarly research around ethnic studies instruction, critical and culturally/community relevant and responsive pedagogies, critical race theory, and intersectionality, which are key theoretical frameworks and pedagogies that can be used in ethnic studies research and instruction.” Chapter 3: Instructional Guidance for K-12 Education, p. 15.

² “Students will learn about how Ethnic Studies is both ‘identity-based’ and also a ‘critical theory of power’ that interrogates multiple structures of hierarchy and inequality (*‘Ethnic Studies: Theorizing Multiculturalism, Diversity, and Power’* by Marable) in order to understand the links between racism, sexism, homophobia and power. “Students will then chart their own intersectionality as a basis for further inquiry in the study of how and why they are shaped by individual experience and group membership.” Appendix A, Ethnic Studies-Academic Language Development 2, Unit 1. Assessing Literacy Skills: Educational Journey-The Formation of Ethnic Identity, p. 40.

A socialist economy, or for that matter a feudal or corporatist economy is, by definition, a system; it must be created, planned, vigilantly monitored and forcefully regulated and enforced in order to function. But a market economy has no plan. It begins to exhibit the qualities of a system when its most influential actors are allowed to bend governmental policies to their advantage, but that is a vastly different thing from a system deliberately designed for stated goals from the beginning.

“Capitalists” can be oppressive, as can (and are) collectivists, nationalists, monarchists and Jacobins. But capitalism cannot be inherently an oppressive system, because the only oppressions (and improvements, to be sure) that can be enforced are deviations from the free market.

As to the specific examples cited above, the critiques of capitalism range from ignorant to offensive.

Example 1 creates a moral equivalence between racism/white supremacy and capitalism. This is facially absurd, not to mention repugnant. Without judging whether “patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy ... ableism, and anthropocentrism” are themselves equivalent to racism, including capitalism in that grouping is at the very least category error. Capitalism, or more precisely, the transactions that manifest within a free market, cannot practice discrimination or show bias. Individuals who participate in the market may exhibit those and other behaviors, such as compassion and empathy. But those behaviors are no more an indicator of capitalism than monogamy is a signifier of socialism.

Example 2 raises an important and legitimate subject of discussion, the oppression and exploitation of Black labor over the course of US history. Indeed, no American ethnic group has suffered such cruel and shameful treatment stemming from the very fact of its labor, from slavery to Jim Crow to myriad formal and informal labor oppressions empowered by governments, businesses, labor unions and law enforcement. But this exploitation was not a feature of capitalism, as this example implies, but an abomination of the labor market sanctioned by legislative and judicial authority. The implied syllogism is false: Black labor was exploited. The United States is capitalist. But Black labor was not therefore exploited because the United States is a free market economy. To be clear, slavery and labor oppression were not unique to capitalism; every form of economic organization, especially top-down and collective societies, have tolerated or enabled slavery. Indeed, it was the might of a free market economy in the Northern States that created the material advantage to destroy slavery in the Civil War. Capitalism and free markets have been among the most liberating forces in human history.

Example 3 repeats the false assertion that capitalism is a system of power. The very choice of capitalism as an exemplary “system of power” is confounded by the definition of that phrase: “These are structures that have the capacity to control circumstances within economic, political, and/or social-cultural contexts.” We have already discussed that nobody “controls” capitalism in these terms. Capitalism, as expressed by Friedrich Hayek, is an immeasurably confusing and constantly changing combination of associations and exchanges – not a “system” of any kind.

More apt to the authors' definition would be economic schemes like socialism or corporatism, which exactly are state-directed economics that favor redistribution of wealth – the ultimate expression of collective economic power. In any case, using “economic systems like capitalism” to illustrate this theme seems more about discrediting free market capitalism than about understanding power differentials affecting selected ethnic groups.

We agree that students can benefit from a better understanding of ethnic communities in California, their history and struggles, especially if the curriculum is taught in the spirit of binding together a community, and not setting group against group. We may differ over the appropriateness of the curriculum being taught within the illiberal framework of critical race theory, but that is not our expertise or focus here.

We strongly urge the Instructional Quality Commission and the State Board of Education to remove these inaccurate, ideological and opprobrious references to capitalism from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me at loren.kaye@calchamber.com, or (916) 601-5221.

Most cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Loren Kaye". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Loren Kaye
President
California Foundation for Commerce and Education