

From: Mel Wacks

Sent: Friday, September 4, 2020 10:38 AM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Committee Members,

I believe that teaching Ethnic Studies to students is a great idea – but only if it is done evenhandedly, without bias to any group. That is not the way that the proposed curriculum appears to be.

The course should begin by teaching that “Many thousands of years ago, not a single human being lived in the Americas” (Melissa Hogenboom, www.bbc.com). She continues: “It is now becoming clear that [people] made Beringia (the icy land bridge from Asia to North America) their home, staying put for several thousand years. This idea is called the Beringian Standstill Hypothesis. This standstill helped these isolated groups of people to become genetically distinct from those they had left behind, according to a 2007 study (see <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0000829>).” The course should differentiate tribes (Apache, Cherokee, Sioux, etc.) just as we differentiate States or European countries.

Next, the course should discuss the first “discoveries” of North America by the Vikings, Europeans and possibly Chinese.

There are the early settlers – such as the English, Dutch, French and Spanish. And then the 19th and 20th century waves of immigrants coming for religious and/or financial reasons – the Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.

And, of course, there are the millions of Africans brought to America as slaves.

Finally, there are the recent waves of immigrants from Latin America and the Moslem countries.

All of these groups have faced problems, including discrimination in America.

As Director of the Jewish-American Hall of Fame, founded and located in California for over 50 years, I am particularly aware of the problems of anti-Semitism – starting with the bigotry of Peter Stuyvesant, who in 1654, wrote to the Dutch West India Company officials that “the deceitful race, — such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ, — be not allowed to further infect and trouble this new colony.” He referred to Jews as a “repugnant race” and “usurers”, and was concerned that “Jewish settlers should not be granted the same liberties enjoyed by Jews in Holland, lest members of other persecuted minority groups, such as Roman Catholics, be attracted to the colony” ([Alan J. Singer](http://www.newyorkalmanack.com), (www.newyorkalmanack.com)).

Before I describe some incidents of anti-Semitism faced by the over 50 honorees in the Jewish-American Hall of Fame (see www.amuseum.org/jahf), I want to give a shout-out for the curriculum to include the achievements of Jewish-Americans — such as Einstein and Salk — and members of all other ethnic groups in America.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis: According to the legal historian Scott Powe, much of the opposition to Brandeis's appointment also stemmed from "blatant anti-semitism." Taft would accuse Brandeis of using his Judaism to curry political favor, and Wickersham would refer to Brandeis's supporters and Taft's critics as "a bunch of Hebrew uplifters." Senator Henry Cabot Lodge privately complained, "If it were not that Brandeis is a Jew, and a German Jew, he would never have been appointed" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Brandeis).

Baseball Hall of Famer Hank Greenberg: As the first Jewish baseball star, Hank Greenberg had to handle racial slurs from fans and opponents alike. Birdie Tebbetts, a Detroit team-mate of Greenberg's for seven seasons, recalled that, "There was nobody in the history of the game who took more abuse than Greenberg, unless it was Jackie Robinson" (Mel Wacks, Medals of the Jewish-American Hall of Fame).

Public Servant and Entertainer Bess Myerson: Bess encountered anti-Semitism during the Miss America Pageant, when an official tried to convince her to change her name to one that was less ethnic, suggesting Betty Merrick. Bess refused (Mel Wacks, Medals of the Jewish-American Hall of Fame).

Joseph Pulitzer: The Hungarian immigrant youth - once a vagrant on the slum streets of St. Louis and taunted as "Joey the Jew" (www.pulitzer.org).

I hope that you will do the right thing and make the Ethnic Study program comprehensive and not just another vehicle of discrimination against one or more groups.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Wacks