

**From:** Pamela Huber  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 24, 2021 2:33 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Corrections to Antisemitism in Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Hello,

I am a Jewish writer and an employee at a literacy nonprofit, and I am writing today with concerns and corrections of antisemitic content in the proposed ethnic studies curriculum for California.

While I am excited to see Jews included in the ethnic studies curriculum, I was dismayed to find several antisemitic issues and omissions in the proposed curriculum:

1. Of all the ethnicities described in the curriculum, only Jews are described as having white privilege. This erases Jews of color and ignores that due to intersectionality, anyone from any ethnic background can have white-passing privilege. Further, by singling out Jews for this "privilege," the curriculum perpetuates deadly antisemitic conspiracies that Jews are not oppressed or antisemites no longer view Jews as non-white.
2. There is no mention of Ashkenazi Jews - only Jews of who "trace their ancestry back to Eastern Europe, and their racial appearance reflects this." This tracing of ancestry goes back beyond Eastern Europe to Judea, but this phrasing implies that Jews whose ancestors spent the Diaspora in Europe are less ethnically Jewish or more white than Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews. This is not categorically true, as intersectionality creates a wide range of racialized appearances among Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews. Not including the term "Ashkenazi" in your description of Jewish people ("Student will be able to develop an understanding of Jewish Middle Eastern Americans (who are also referred to as Arab Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Persian Jews)") implies that Ashkenazi Jews are not worthy of ethnic study as an ethnic minority. This description also leaves out other Jewish minorities in India, South America, Yemen, Ethiopia, etc).
3. The term "Jewish Middle Eastern Americans" is not a term Jews use to identify themselves. All ethnically Jewish people are Judean.
4. The examples of antisemitism provided include examples from the 1940s and modern-day synagogue shootings. This incomplete picture makes antisemitism seem sporadic, and completely ignores anti-Israel sentiments that become antisemitic when targeted at Jewish individuals and institutions in America.
5. Do not single out Jews for "conditional white privilege" as this is a concept invented by white supremacists to divide Jews from other BIPOC people fighting against oppression and white supremacy.
6. Words like "many" and "often" are used with the intention to imply intersectionality, but without specifics, they do the opposite, creating a stereotypical view of Jews. For example, "Many Jewish Americans trace their ancestry to Eastern Europe, and their racial appearance reflects this." and "Descendents of Jewish immigrants often assimilated and changed their position in the racial hierarchy from their immigrant parents, gaining racial privilege." These statements make it seem that all Jews are white, European, and have completely assimilated into American life. By not naming "Ashkenazi Jews" in the first sentence or qualifying the second sentence with a modifier such as "white-passing," the lesson plan deconstructs the identity groups it previously established, causing confusion for students.

7. Saying Jews have "gained racial privilege" through assimilation is dangerous for reasons previously stated (they are the only ethnic group singled out for "racial privilege") but it also implies Jews comprise a race, which contradicts earlier portions of the lesson. While Jews are *not a race*, antisemitism is a form of racial oppression, since oppressors view Jews as a race. Jews have not gained a racial privilege (they look the same as their immigrant parents); rather, white supremacist tactics of antisemitism shifted from discussing Jews as openly as a separate race.

**Here are suggestions from me, a Jewish American currently writing curriculum on antisemitism and Jewish history for CommonLit** (an education nonprofit that provides free online reading materials for ELA, social studies, and science and is used throughout California):

1. Make the first lesson objective to be "develop an understanding of Jewish Americans and differentiate the various identities, nationalities, and subethnicities (including Sephardic Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Yemenite Jews, Beta Israel or Ethiopian Jews, Persian Jews, and others) that make up the Jewish American community.
2. Strike all mention of "Jewish Middle Eastern Americans" from the curriculum. Use Mizrahi or Sephardic.
3. Ensure that lessons on antisemitism covers: A. European antisemitism throughout the Middle Ages (beginning with the Crusades) through to the Holocaust, and how this history of 1000 years of antisemitism in Europe has led to persistent antisemitism among Americans of European descent today. B. Antisemitism against Mizrahi Jews who were ethnically cleansed from the Middle East in the 1940s C. The persecution of Yemenite and Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) from their homelands in the 1905s to present day). D. Modern-day anti-Israel acts that target Jews and are, therefore, antisemitic.
4. Amend the fact sheet on Jewish Americans and Complicating Ideas of race to explain the antisemitic origins among white supremacists of the concepts of Jews as having racial privilege. Specifically mention that white supremacists have attempted to single out Jews as having racial privilege in an effort to separate Jewish and BIPOC oppressed groups, foment distrust, and prevent them for working for one another's collective liberation. By examining concepts of race through the lens of the people who invent racial concepts to oppress others (rather than claiming Jews have changed their racial identity), the lesson can then convey the original ideas of the lesson without misguiding students into believing the antisemitic concepts that Jews have conditional white privilege). ALTERNATIVELY, you can create an entirely separate lesson on conditional whiteness that includes Jews, Latinx, and other intersectional groups that experience conditional whiteness and white privilege; in doing so, please strike messages from lessons on Jews that single them out for racial privilege.
5. Ensure that modern antisemitism lessons discuss the antisemitic conspiracy theories that continue to operate today: that all Jews are white, privilege, not oppressed, control banking or the media, and are not indigenous to Israel. Not naming antisemitic conspiracies we have all heard makes it appear antisemitism is only an issue of neo-Nazis, when that is not the case. Everyone can unknowingly have and engage with antisemitic bias.
6. Ensure that all other ethnicities described in the curriculum are also given the note that "Light-skinned [insert ethnic group] simultaneously experience white privilege on the basis of their appearance and prejudice, discrimination, and systemic antisemitism on the basis of their ethnicity." Again, do not single out light-skinned Jews for white privilege when any light-skinned, white-passing, or mixed/intersectional person can have white privilege.

Thank you for your attention to these corrections. It is important that Jews are involved in crafting this curriculum to ensure antisemitic tropes do not seep into the curriculum. Antisemitism is old and it morphs over time and it can be easy for anyone, including Jews, to fall victim to antisemitic bias that has been carefully crafted and hidden from view.

Please consult the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for further information.

Sincerely,  
Pamela Huber