

**From:** Cathy Engel-Marder  
**Sent:** Monday, August 5, 2019 12:52 AM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Subject:** Public comment re proposed ethnic studies curriculum

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a retired Licensed Clinical Social Worker and former Spanish interpreter in the Superior Court System of California. I have written and presented workshops throughout the country on improving medical and social service delivery to underserved populations. In other words, the goal of promoting “self and collective empowerment” among students of all ethnicities is one that I applaud.

Having read “Draft 2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” I am extremely disappointed. This proposal appears to be more about supporting a specific political paradigm than its stated goals of accuracy, inclusiveness and enhanced critical thinking skills.

The model is built on the premise that we can divide American society neatly into two groups: the oppressors, who are white, and the oppressed (people of color and Native populations). Aside from being simplistic, this paradigm renders invisible any group whose experiences do not fit the model.

Two such groups immediately come to mind: the Irish, whose large scale immigration was triggered by famine and who were definitely among the oppressed when they first arrived; and the Jews, who have survived centuries of persecution and who currently face a substantial increase in hate crimes, both in the United States and around the world. Not only does the “white power and oppression” model fail to examine the complexities of these cases; it also omits the fact that the historic oppression of the “white” Jews has inspired them to be consistently among the strongest advocates of inclusion and equality for all Americans.

Ironically, Jews are mentioned only in the context of Israel-Palestine, with a pronounced anti-Israel bias. This hardly constitutes “language that is inclusive and supportive” or creating “a space for all students to learn about and analyze their identities and histories, feel proud of them, and actualize their full humanity.” In order to accomplish this stated goal, any discussion of Israel-Palestine must acknowledge the complexity of the conflict and provide unbiased context.

In short, I find this curriculum model simplistic, politically driven and divisive. Rather than enabling students to develop cultural understanding and critical thinking, it perpetuates an “us” vs. “them” paradigm that is ultimately harmful to all.

Thank you for allowing me to share my concerns. I hope that you will take my comments into consideration in the development of future drafts.

Sincerely,  
Cathy Engel-Marder, LCSW