

From: Talia Guzmán
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2021 9:31 PM
To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Education Issues/Concerns

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to address some concerns regarding the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum's (ESMC) Third Field Review. I first want to express thanks for the two lesson plans on Jewish Americans – Sample Lessons 40 and 41, *Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans and Jewish Americans: Identity, Intersectionality, and Complicating Ideas of Race*. Additionally, I am grateful for the listing of antisemitism as a form of bigotry and oppression, especially at a time of increasing hate crimes and incidents targeting Jews.

I would like to ask for the following:

- revise the above lessons to address the below misrepresentations of Jews
- transparency and an opportunity for public comment in all phases of the development of a final ESMC
- an Ethnic Studies course incorporating “core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations” (Education Code section 51226.7) to enrich California students’ understanding of American history and current events

While the ESMC does address that Jews consist of many racial identities, it conflates race and religion in terms of privilege. White and/or white-passing Jews are more privileged than Jews of Color and other racial/ethnic groups in America, but that privilege has nothing to do with their Judaism—but rather those individuals’ race. Additionally, some of the below excerpts ignore the identities of Jews of Color by painting Jews as white.

Page 511 of the current draft states that “descendants of Jewish immigrants often assimilated and changed their position on the racial hierarchy from their immigrant parents, gaining racial privilege.” Based on the three most comprehensive data sets available (the 2013-2019 American Jewish Population Project, the 2011 New York Community Study, and the 2017 San Francisco Bay Area Community Study), researchers estimate that Jews of Color represent approximately 12-15% of American Jews, or about 1,000,000 of the United States’ 7,200,000 Jews.¹ The foregoing excerpt disregards the experiences of Jews of Color, as they were, and still are, unable to gain racial privilege simply by changing their names. Jews of Color do not possess any additional racial privilege in America than non-Jewish people of color; any belief otherwise would be a claim rooted in anti-Semitic theory about Jewish power. The racial privilege a white/white-passing Jew can gain has nothing to do with their Judaism, but rather with their race, and therefore should not be conflated with the Jewish narrative.

Additionally, the above excerpt implies that white-passing Jews simply *chose* to change their names, when in reality many were forced to in order to survive, and had to deal with the resulting trauma of a loss of culture.

Page 510 and 511 of the current draft also state that “anti-Jewish prejudice decreased” post 1945 as Jews were able to gain “conditional whiteness”. The above paragraphs already illustrate why the “conditional whiteness” phrase is detrimental and erasive, and stating that prejudice is decreasing is also inaccurate. In 2014, 609 anti-Jewish hate crime incidents were reported to the FBI. By 2018, the most recent year for which statistics are publicly available, that number had increased nearly 40 percent, to 835 incidents.² According to the FBI’s 2018 Hate Crime Statistics, “a breakdown of the bias motivation of religious-biased offenses showed: 57.8 percent were anti-Jewish.”³

Including the above excerpts “as-is” in the ESMC would teach Californian youth a flawed narrative minimizing prejudice against Jews, overshadowing the identities and hardships faced by millions of Jews of Color, and include dangerous tropes about Jewish power.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,
Talia Guzmán

Sources:

- 1) <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/population-of-jews-of-color-is-increasing-in-u-s-despite-undercounting-in-population-studies/>
<https://jewsofcolorfieldbuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Counting-Inconsistencies-052119.pdf>
- 2) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/anti-semitic-attacks-more-violent-hate-crimes-new-york-n1110036>
- 3) <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2018/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses>