

From: [email redacted]

Sent: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 7:41 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Commentary on ESMC from a Jewish CA Resident

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Paul Goleburn, and I am a longtime resident of LA county. I'm an Ashkenazi Jew and I am writing to voice my concerns regarding the proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Many of the tenets proposed in this curriculum are vehemently toxic and ignorantly portray Jews as a uniquely privileged class.

The nature of Jewish identity and persecution is long and complex, and subsequently confounds the limited Critical Social Justice understanding of cultural oppression; ultimately resulting in a troubling depiction of Jews. This framing constructs a Leftist Jewish Question and, unavoidably, a Jewish problem - distinct, but not entirely dissimilar, from Nazism (not hyperbole).

Unfortunately, the proposed curriculum does NOT satisfy the central tenets outlined in the draft when discussing Jews and the "privilege" of supposed white-passing Jews (often associated with Ashkenazim). The curriculum fails *'addressing racialized experiences and ethnic differences as real and unique'* when pertaining to Jews. It fails in this way by reducing Jewishness and discrimination to mere skin color, and it wrongly asserts that Jews fall into two camps; White passing "privileged" Jews and Jews of color who are subject to discrimination. The very idea of this dichotomy is fallacious and ignorant. There are, indeed, many sub-sects of Jewish people (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Mizrahim, Beta Israel, etc. [all of which vary in skin tones]) and Jewish religiosity (Orthodox, Traditional, Reform, Secular), but dividing us by skin color is needlessly divisive – not to mention an imperfect depiction of how discrimination manifests for a Jew. Making Jews the exception to other ethnic groups in this way, denoting some of us as colored and some of us as white (or white-passing) does NOT accurately represent our *'real and unique' racialized experiences'*.

These facets of the proposed curriculum also fail to *'[build] greater understanding and communication across ethnic differences'*. Instead, it offers the inverse; greater confusion, reductionist framing, needless division & resentment, and it introduces terminology foreign to, and quite useless for, the vast amount of Jews in the diaspora. Grouping Jews into these two camps also fails to recognize real and distinct Jewish ethnicities. For instance, I am

100% Ashkenazi and have pale skin. My father, also Ashkenazi, has incredibly dark skin for which he is often profiled for at airports. According to the logic described in this curriculum, my father is a Jew of Color and I am not, despite being of the same lineage and ethnicity. Now, if my father had a more 'white-passing' nose and straight hair, and I had a bigger, more stereotypically Jewish nose and dark curly hair, despite my skin being fairer, who looks more identifiably Jewish? Your model must satisfactorily answer that question if it is to incorporate Jews into this curriculum and the ultimate answer is it simply cannot - because every Jewish person's experience of prejudice and discrimination differs and we cannot be neatly partitioned into two arbitrary groups based on but one facet of our appearance. Jews are discriminated against, hated for, and killed for simply being Jews; irrespective of our skin color.

Lastly, the proposed curriculum fails to *'[reveal] underlying commonalities that can bind by bringing individuals and groups together... Ethnic studies is designed to benefit all students.'* This curriculum clearly focuses on small, perceived differences *within* the Jewish community (though it is imposed *on* the Jewish community) and not the underlying commonalities of the Jewish experience. This version of the Ethnic Studies Model most certainly does NOT benefit Jewish students; if anything it actively harms them.

There are many issues with this proposed curriculum, which dramatically increases the significance of race and radical identity politics in the classroom and is little more than dogmatic & counterproductive activism encroaching on Jewish life. Jewish identity, Jewish life, Jewish oppression, & Jewish history cannot be viewed, solely, through an ignorant and reductionist lens.

I feel compelled to also add that a man was photographed wearing a "Camp Auschwitz" sweatshirt in the Capitol building during the January 6th insurrection. A dozen "white-passing" Jewish members of the Tree of Life Synagogue in PA (two being the grandparents of my Jewish colleague) were brutally slaughtered, not even 3 years ago, by white supremacists. This is not a privilege. The only group that holds whiteness as a virtue does not consider us to be white. The proposed Ethnic Studies program does nothing but advance ignorance about the Jewish people, and with familiarity of the Holocaust fading from the public consciousness and the rise of global antisemitism rearing its ugly head once again, the onus is on us to secure our history and our future.

Please reconsider implementing this curriculum as is. We can do better.

Thank you,
Paul Goleburn

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