

**From:** Alexi Pierce

**Sent:** Sunday, January 24, 2021 9:57 AM

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

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comments on Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

To Whom It May Concern:

It has recently been brought to my attention that there continue to be issues with the ethnic studies curriculum being proposed for students K-12 in the state of California. While I admit I think instituting such a curriculum could be beneficial for students and I believe the intentions are good, I have many concerns regarding the language and planned curriculum around Jewish Americans.

To start, the Jewish American proposed lessons are the only ones where the following terms are found: "conditional whiteness" and "privilege." There are many issues with this, including but not limited to the following:

- Other ethnic groups can have "conditional whiteness." This is not specific to Jews and frankly erases all of the Black, Brown and everything in between Jews who do not pass as white.
- Additionally, teaching kids that Jews have "conditional whiteness" feeds into a common trope that Jews are sneaky and are able to morph into any group they want as long as it benefits them.
- By only mentioning "privilege" in the Jewish American section, we again start feeding into stereotypes about Jews: that they are wealthy and are in a position they believe is above all others. I believe that this curriculum is meant to address white supremacy and white privilege, which I commend, but by lumping Jewish Americans (again while simultaneously erasing the experiences of many Jews of color) in with white Americans who hold this privilege does not bode well for Jews and is actually antisemitic.
- The lesson plans around Jewish Americans hit heavy on the theme that Jews are either discriminated against OR they've assimilated and hold privilege. Again this is dangerous for Jews, erases Jews of color, and feeds into common anti-Jewish stereotypes.

The fact sheet provided on Jewish Americans is highly offensive and in some ways factually wrong. Some examples include:

- The Jewish people coming about 3,000 years ago in Southwest Asia - if you look at our calendar year we are on 5781 and we originate from Israel
- While it is correct to say that anyone can be considered Jewish (meaning we accept them as Jews even if someone converted to Judaism), the following bullet point is highly offensive:
  - "Jews are part of the Jewish American community by birth, adoptions, marriage, and by throwing their lot in with the Jewish people through conversion or being part of a Jewish family."
- I don't think I really need to explain why this is offensive, but it is. Using the phrase "throwing their lot in with the Jewish people" has a negative connotation and immediately brought to mind that if my husband and I lived in Nazi Germany he would have also been murdered solely due to his proximity to me, a Jew. There are better ways to get this point across.

Additionally, there is a comment within the Jewish American section stating that after WWII and the Holocaust Jews developed a "vigilance" for social justice worldwide. There are many issues with saying

this. For one, as part of the Jewish religion, we are taught "tikun olam," which means an aspiration to behave and act constructively and beneficially. This ties in with tzedakah and committing mitzvot - providing and caring for others and doing good deeds. This has been around for centuries and is not new after the Holocaust. This phrasing depicts Jews as a worldwide cabal seeking vengeance, which is yet another antisemitic trope.

Finally, the Jewish American lesson plan is the only one with the proposed activity of the "Iceberg of Identity." The goal of this activity is to identify visible, somewhat visible, and invisible identity factors. Reading this proposed lesson plan for children around Jewish Americans made me extremely uncomfortable. This once again is feeding into the antisemitic idea that Jews are hiding something beneath the surface and are sneaky. We're so sneaky, in fact, that sometimes you can't even identify visually whether we are Jewish or not. Also, the visualization of an iceberg where you can only see a little bit of it above water and the majority of it is hidden in the depths of cold water and is dangerous just waiting to cut a hole in your boat and sink it is not a great one.

In summary, I highly recommend a thorough reworking of the Jewish American section of the proposed ethnic curriculum. Again, I believe there are good intentions and this program could be positive and implemented well, but how it is currently written regarding Jewish Americans is offensive, wrong, and actually perpetuates antisemitism and anti-Jewish tropes.

Best,  
Alexi T. Pierce