

**From:** Adam Holland  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 2, 2020 9:20 AM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Regarding Ethnic Studies

Dear CDE,

I am a California Social Studies teacher of 14 years, a product of California public schools, and from a family residing in Southern California for the past 140 years. I have reviewed the entirety of the Ethnic Studies and while I think the overall intentions of the course are genuine, I have a few general concerns I hope the Dept. of Education will consider. Please consider each topic below.

**Course as a Whole** - The intentions of the course as a whole are genuine. The desire for students to be able to research various people groups to better understand different groups is noble in its intentions. Hiding beneath the course though are some subtleties that are worrisome, including some of the founders of the movement, such as W.E.B du Bois whose past is somewhat questionable.

One of our goals in educating students, particularly in the current Common Core realities, is to get students to think critically, independently and to justify their thinking with facts and evidence. I worry that the Common Core skills are not embedded into the Ethnic Studies curriculum. I realize that teachers appear to have a lot of leeway in how to address the curriculum, but without skills the course does seem to be more of a, and please excuse my word use, indoctrination, as is seen on most college campuses.

Students need to learn how to think, evaluate, develop evidence-based arguments and solutions. There is much coming from the university systems that show our students are less capable of these skills after leaving the university system than when leaving the secondary school system.

How does the Ethnic Studies program help our students become the best people they can be? How does it help students learn to contribute to the enrichment of society and all people of society? How does it help students grow in their abilities? How does Ethnic Studies allow our students to learn how to think and reason for themselves with evidence and facts to support their arguments?

**Story** - As a history teacher, my goal is to help students see their role in world history, and to consider how the history of long ago continues to impact us today. The essential question for my class is "How'd we get here?" meaning, how did what we are studying impact us in the present. These tend to be bigger historical realities. I understand the desire for a variety of people groups to be included in the curriculum as much as possible, but many times this clouds the overall historical narrative. Teachers many times, because of the lack of time in class, will barely mention a certain people group, or give a token comment.

That does allow us to view a variety of people groups into the Ethnic Studies, but the Ethnic Studies course is not a history course looking at how various people groups contributed to our collective historical narrative, but more of a focus on understanding the plight of various people groups and giving credence to their narrative.

One thing I have tried to do in my courses is to have my students see their role in history as their own individual story. Yes, we can look at people groups, but the reality is that we each have a story that we bring to the table, whether big, impactful story as some have, or a smaller, not less significant story in the places we live and the people we regularly interact with. All almost 8 billion people on this earth have a story to live and a story to tell. Some stories are best sellers, while others are written and read and appreciated by a few. Each story though is our history, but the course does not lend itself to us understanding the entire story of us as an American people group.

Below are my thoughts on changes to the course itself.

**Course** - The course itself talks about change as a whole, but as we see throughout history, change as a whole can be quite tricky, and partisan. In my class I do a quote of the day and later in the year I share one of my favorites that I first heard while watching *Schindler's List*, "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire." The Ethnic Studies course has a focus on changing communities, society, and the government as a whole. I have often found though that true change to people's lives comes through interacting with others, conversing with others, dialoguing with others, sitting down with someone you disagree with and sharing your thoughts and opinions, maybe disagreeing, but getting up and realizing it's okay to have a different opinion and still be friends.

I do not see any of these skills in the course at all, but I see overall movements of groups to bring change instead of teaching students to bring change in and of themselves first and then person to person. Genuine change is going to start within and then it's going to reach out to other people.

There are such basic realities that we have long forgotten, maybe the most important is to "treat others the way you want to be treated." Such a simple change will bring about the change we want to see in the world. The curriculum should include skills that will help students to learn to converse, communicate, and work with people who might think differently.

If I were to teach the course, I would make it a research course first of students researching their own backgrounds, family trees, creating a personal narrative as much as possible. Then I would focus on the idea of change and look at change in the past, how change works, and what's the best way to bring about change. It would be more of an inquiry course, like the AP Capstone course, allowing each student to choose a Ethnic Studies research topic and have some type of final project or presentation at the end. At the end of the course, students would be able to reason, argue, debate, respect,

reason with each other in agreement and disagreement, not to win an argument, but to have a conversation, not to dominate a method of change, but change our world one life interaction at a time.

I understand this may be different than the course created by California, but could not teach the course as it presently is. I will say that at the end of the day, it does not appear the course has been created from one perspective and has not included a variety of stakeholders on how to best create and implement the course.

**Adam Holland**  
Social Studies Teacher