

**From:** Rabbi Adam Schaffer  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 11:51 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comments on the Ethnic Studies Curriculum

To Whom It May Concern:

I have the privilege of being a rabbi, a representative of the Jewish community here in Los Angeles. It is with that heavy responsibility on my shoulders that I write to voice my concerns about some of the problems with the latest draft of California's Ethnic Studies Curriculum.

One of the greatest challenges of incorporating Jews in this curriculum is that we are both a prominent minority and an incredibly small one. Because of our tiny size (2% of the US population and 0.2% of the world's inhabitants), many of the future students who will be using this curriculum will never have met a Jew in their lives. That means they will be introduced to Jews in their Ethnic Studies class. Other groups will be more likely to be represented in a California classroom. They will have representatives who can both nuance and humanize whatever portrayals there are in the course. We Jews are not so fortunate. As such, it becomes incredibly important to have accurate portrayals of Jews in this course. As the curriculum stands, there are some gross mistakes that need to be corrected.

I could detail each of the errors in the curriculum, but [the article linked here](#) does a better job than I could possibly do on my own. The one piece I want to emphasize on my own is the fact that Jews are the only group in California's proposed curriculum for whom the term "privilege" is used.

While there can be no doubt that light skin does sometimes provide Jews a capacity to "pass," such an ability does nothing to lessen the dangers of anti-Semitism that Jews face all the time. It certainly does nothing to convince white supremacists that we are acceptable. As the article says, "There ought to be no discussion about Jews and privilege that doesn't begin by talking about the historically enacted and repeated genocidal ideology that revolves around Jews and privilege. For an ethnic studies curriculum to go traipsing through that discourse without a single mention of its ugly and bloody history is not a lesson about anti-Semitism. It is a repetition of it. By itself, that should effectuate a vote of no confidence in the entire franchise."

The [linked article](#) is not very long, but it does a fine job of illustrating the problems with the way Jews are portrayed in this curriculum. A student who was introduced to Jews and Judaism through this course as currently constituted would think that Jews were "imposters and appropriators of privilege – people who pose as something to which they have no legitimate claim." This kind of trope is a frequent theme of anti-Semitism throughout the centuries. Introducing Jews in this way is more likely to **\*contribute\*** to anti-Semitism rather than alleviating it. In other words, for Jews this curriculum *achieves the exact opposite of its stated goals*. Rather than decreasing the pervasiveness of stereotypes and hatred, it serves to increase it.

For all the reasons above, I hope that you will make alterations to this draft. If you have any concerns or questions, just email me. Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

L'shalom,  
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Director, Sevrans Center for Jewish Learning and Living