

I am sending this comment not only as a Californian but as a former university professor who has taught Sociology of Race, among other courses, and who has researched and published on racism as an aspect of criminal justice (I was trained in criminology at the University of California Berkeley).

I think it is an excellent idea to reconsider how history and social studies are taught in California.

However, the proposed curriculum needs attention to be paid to the following issues

1. An ethnic studies course will affect future Californians' understanding of their state only if all the other social science and history courses and textbooks are examined for their ethnic assumptions and omissions. Otherwise it will become the "PC" course that unsympathetic students sleep through, like many mandated workplace diversity trainings.

2. The choice of ethnic groups seems based on either historic university Ethnic Studies programs (e.g., Black and Chicano studies) or contemporary nationwide political concerns (e.g., Islamophobia, prejudice against Central American immigrants) rather than guided by **California's actual history and contemporary reality**. For instance, where in the curriculum are today's many thousands of Chinese- or Indian-American first- and second-generations who are **not** descended from railroad or farm workers and who do **not** fit the profile of impoverished and exploited immigrants and refugees? And where is the history of white European-descended people from Oklahoma and Texas who came in the 1930s and **were** impoverished and exploited?

3. The purpose seems confused. Is it to discourage racism? If so, then it **is** appropriate to focus on the most currently discriminated or neglected groups rather than focus on all major groups. But then students should not be forced to disclose their **own** ethnic histories, which may not only lay outside these narratives of oppression but which may create an impression that they are the oppressors. Such a course should **not** be called Ethnic Studies, but something like Racism in the U.S. Today.

4. If, however, the major purpose is to accurately describe ethnicity in past and present California — which I think **should** be the goal, and which will

hopefully discourage racism by teaching the facts — see my comment (#2) about which groups to include. Why have a whole section on Muslim Arabs when California has very few people with that ancestry, compared to other ethnic or religious groups that are much more populous (Armenians, Jews, Iranians)?

5. While it is important to teach the history of people of color's victimization by discrimination and even genocide, it is important to acknowledge that not all of this was perpetrated by Anglo white people. People who we would consider today as Latino enslaved people who we would consider today as American Indian in the missions up and down the state. History is complicated.

6. There are often no hard-and-fast answers to some questions, like “Immigrants take our jobs: fact or fiction.” (Also, who is “our?”) Data show there are mixed effects of immigrants on local job conditions depending on the robustness of the economy, type of job, prevailing wage, etc. High school kids need to be encouraged to handle complexities as part of critical thinking.

7. As I’m sure you’ve already heard — this curriculum needs to excise the jargon, or else the material will be unintelligible in ten years. (It is unintelligible to my computer right now, which flagged dozens of words as misspellings.)

8. The course should not claim to address things it does not directly discuss: sexism or social class, for example. While the curriculum can be sensitive to these issues, that’s not the same as actual courses such as Gender Studies or Capitalism and Inequality.

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