

DATE: September 29, 2020

TO: ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov
Ethnic Studies Comments, California Department of Education

FROM: Ida R. Eblinger Kelley, Retired Federal Executive, Historian & Independent Consultant

RE: Proposed Ethnic Studies Framework and Curriculum & Reaction to Secretary
Thurmond's Press Release Announcing the 2020 Updates, and Additions not yet
Incorporated <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr20/yr20rel68.asp>

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1. ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THESE COMMENTS

I am a **retired, 20 year *federal* (non-partisan) executive in Washington DC and Orange County, California** (1998-2017), one of few Latina/Latinx to reach the GS-15 rank (highest civil servant rank, Latinos are heavily underrepresented in the Federal Government). My academic and federal career focused on ensuring equality and access to services and information to all, but in particular to the disenfranchised, in education and healthcare as well as the understanding of our civic role and preservation of our nation's history. My degrees are in American History, focused on immigration, diversity and ethnic identity in the United States. I have 25 years of direct and extensive academic, education and policy research, communications, outreach and empowerment to virtually all groups represented in the state's curriculum. I understand the power of federal, state and local governments at their best and most challenging.

Please see enclosed one-page career/education highlights, at the end of this document

2. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT – ETHNIC STUDIES IN CALIFORNIA

As someone who has dedicated her career to helping the disenfranchised, I applaud the California Legislature and State Department of Education's effort to create an ethnic studies curriculum that ultimately is to empower minority groups about their own history while educating others who have little or no knowledge of this experience. This is a massive and much needed undertaking. It is significant.

Ethnic Studies is rich and nuanced. It is delicate and complex. It requires savvy and sensitive expertise coupled with a thoughtful, thorough, balanced and transparent process - this is where the State faltered.

Although, Mr. Medina's legislation called for a non-political and multicultural approach, last year's draft ignored groups and contained blatantly anti-Semitic and political content - by inclusion or exclusion. Not only did this shock and hurt the Jewish community, it pitted ethnic groups against each other which goes against the very spirit of the vision of this curriculum. The corrections to last year's draft lay flat because this year's content more subtly includes and excludes important themes. Coupled with the troubling announcement – outside the “transparent” process – to add additional ethnic groups to the core four previously identified, I am saddened. It reflects distinct bias. It reflects inconsistent logic and a double standard. Again, this pits groups against each other and damages the spirit of collaboration and support for the curriculum. California is a national and global leader and its citizens deserve better.

In addition to specific requests, I outline key themes with data and resources that the state has misunderstood or overlooked – I go into some depth because I feel there is a need to explain the errors. Because if the contributors understood this knowledge, I would not need to contribute comments.

I believe the state can still *primarily* focus on the core four groups, but needs to include scholarly perspectives outside the “Critical Ethnic Studies” field, and leverage the vast knowledge of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural scholars in history, political science, social studies, anthropology and so on. This will ultimately lead to a much more successful execution of this effort.

3. CLARIFYING HISTORY AND CURRENT EVENTS MISREPRESENTED

Although this may seem alarmist, or an exaggeration – the state, through this curriculum, is inadvertently institutionalizing anti-Semitic theories. The proposed structure creates a serious gap in current and historic truth. There is extensive mainstream, respected research, policy and data that supports this.

Sadly and ironically, Jews, along with the core four ethnic groups proposed in the curriculum have long been victims and the target of hate, violence and discrimination in the United States (and Jews, globally for millennia) – both systemized by society, institutions, organized religion and government, subtly and overtly, and directly by white supremacist groups, religious groups and accepted mainstream practices. Jews are an ethnic-religious group. Anti-Semitism is the oldest form of racism.

In fact, anti-Semitism is overtly the CORE driving belief of extremist white nationalism and yet sadly, unrecognized as part of centrist thinking. To insufficiently and incompletely discuss anti-Semitism while insisting Jews have white privilege reinforces my very concern at the state level.

Academic and Research that Supports this Line of Argumentation – white nationalism's ties to systemic discrimination and directly :

Eric Ward is an African-American civil rights expert on hate issues. He is a native Californian at the Western States Center in Portland, Oregon and he is a fellow with Race Forward in Oakland. He states in:

<https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism> and which I believe the curriculum disturbingly counters the following factual points (emphasis added):

— "To recognize that antisemitism **is not a sideshow to racism** within white nationalist thought is important for at least two reasons.

- First, it allows us to identify the fuel that white nationalist ideology uses to power its anti-Black racism, its contempt for other people of color, and its xenophobia—...
- And:... "...as with every form of hateful ideology, **what is explicit on the margins is implicit in the center**, in ways we have not yet begun to unpack. This means the notion that Jews long ago and uncontestedly became White folks in the U.S.—became, in effect, post-racial—is a myth that we must dispel."

— "Antisemitism, I discovered, is a particular and potent form of racism so central to White supremacy that Black people would not win our freedom without tearing it down."

To ignore the connection of white supremacy to white privilege is revisionist. To ignore what Eric Ward states ignores reality of history and current events.

Why this is important?

The recent spike of anti-Semitism (which has always been the leading form of hate crimes over the past 30 years, more below).

Anti-Semitism among Millennials and Generation Z students is also rampant. Both my daughters have direct and indirect experience with this at school and through social media bullying. Holocaust instruction is often watered down and students are shielded from the difficult aspects of the atrocities and the events that led to the catastrophe. Many students deny the Holocaust existed although the Holocaust represents humanity's greatest atrocities based on legitimized discrimination and racist theories.

Because of the lack of the understanding of Jewish-American history, the rise of Nazism and the existence Holocaust, it is no surprise that there is a rise of use of anti-Semitic tropes even among local, state and nationally (of all ethnic backgrounds) elected officials.

4. REQUESTED CHANGES/INCLUSION/DELETIONS

- a. **Include a specifically nuanced explanation of anti-Semitism *and* its direct relevance to the hate of all minority groups. (Refer to item #2 above)**
 - i. ***Use the international definition of anti-Semitism as adopted by the European Union, the United States and incorporated at the Departments of State and Education***
 - b. **Remove reference that anti-Semitic hate crimes is a “recent” trend. Rather, it is a long-lasting trend that has increased in recent years. It is an important nuance.**
 - c. **Remove ALL explicit and implicit references of “White Privilege” in the context of the Jewish American Experience. To state so, is revisionist and by default anti-Semitic. White Privilege is really White Christian Privilege.**
 - d. **Recognize that Jews are an ethnic-religious group. And do not fit cleanly in any race/color/privilege paradigm.**
 - e. **Include the Jewish American Experience as part of the curriculum**
 - f. **Arab-American Experience – Need to provide proposed content for review and suggested content.**
 - g. **Discussion of 1965 Immigration Act must include connect to earlier discriminatory immigration policies that directly and significantly impacted the Jewish community.**
 - h. **Note on the curriculum provided by the UC system.**
- **Items a, b, c, d (anti-Semitism, white privilege, Jews as an ethnic-religious group, Jewish American Experience)**

The California Department of Education cannot deny anti-Semitism is a part of the Jewish and greater American experience. Many of the philosophies, individuals and groups that created the distinct experiences that marginalized the very peoples which you seek to shed light on (four foundational disciplines: African American, Chicano and Latinx, Native

American, and Asian American studies) also are/were anti-Semitic. This marginalization comes from a place of white *Christian* privilege and white nationalism, which has a long history in the United States. White Nationalism targets all people of color.

According to demographic data, 15% of American Jews are of color and nearly half – 50% - of the global Jewish community are people of color, heavily represented from the Middle East and North Africa.

- **To reinforce the above requests, understanding all core groups faced hate and discrimination, and the announcement of a focus on Arab/Muslim experience, it is important to understand this particular data** - according to an American Enterprise Institute (AEI is a noted non-partisan think tank) analysis “**Jews were 2.7X more likely than blacks, 2.2X more likely than Muslims to be hate crime victim.**” Additionally, AEI points out:

The FBI data for 2018 on anti-religion hate crimes also reveal that of the 1,617 victims of anti-religious hate crimes last year in the US, 920 were Jews (56.9% of the total) and 236 victims were Muslims (14.6% of the total). **Obviously, since more than half (53.7%) of the anti-religious hate crime incidents in 2018 were against Jews, there were more hate crime incidents last year of anti-religious hate crimes against Jews (920) than incidents of hate crimes against all other religious groups combined (397).** Source: <https://www.aei.org/carpe-diem/new-2018-fbi-data-jews-were-2-7x-more-likely-than-blacks-2-2x-more-likely-than-muslims-to-be-hate-crime-victim/>

According to the FBI, Jews and Jewish Institutions are the leading “religious victim group” of hate crimes for the past 30 years. <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-urges-action-after-fbi-reports-jews-were-target-of-most-religion-based-hate>

- **White privilege is erroneously applied to the Jewish experience.** It intentionally puts Jews on the oppressor side of the race-class divide. To quote Eric Ward again, from the same article identified in item #2, which further addresses all the requests I've listed under this section.
 - i. “By insisting that Jews are “white,” and that anti-Semitism is a fringe prejudice, we are unwittingly aiding the white nationalist movement, by shielding their core beliefs from view, and protecting them from direct attack.”
 - ii. “If we acknowledge that white nationalism clearly and forcefully names Jews as non-white, and did so in the very fiber of its emergence as a post-civil rights right-wing revolutionary movement, then we will all be forced to recognize our own ignorance about the country we thought we lived in. It is time for us to have that conversation.”
 - iii. “Contemporary social justice movements are quite clear that to refuse anti-racism is an act of racism; to refuse feminism is an act of sexism. To refuse opposition to anti-Semitism, likewise, is an act of anti-Semitism. Arguably, not much more should need to be said than that.”
- **The state should use the international definition of anti-Semitism as adopted by the European Union, the United States and incorporated at the Departments of State and Education**

Broader historical examples for further context how you cannot ignore anti-Semitic - racism connections in history:

Since the moment Europeans landed in the Americas, Jews have faced anti-Semitism. When Columbus set sail, Spain's concurrent Inquisition-era edicts forced Jews to convert to Christianity or leave Spain or face death. Jews fleeing Spain settled to many other countries, including the Americas even though those policies carried to the conquest of the Americas.

Or more recently, major 20th century thought of eugenics and the embrace of Hitler's Germany by American business leaders, politicians and white society throughout the country. Hate groups embrace Nazism and the Swastika as a celebrated symbol along with propaganda materials and anti-Semitic tropes as representative of their beliefs. Their hate decidedly directed toward Jews, in addition to people of color. And to clarify – there are Jews of color – actual or perceived -- as well.

Additionally, Jews did and still face rancor from dominant religious groups because they follow a different faith. Some continue old teachings that Jews killed Jesus. And certainly, Jews face every day, subtle stereotypes that create resentment, desensitization and hatred. That all Jews are wealthy, Hollywood is run by Jews, Jews dominate Wall Street and desire to dominate the world (these is the same garbage hate groups spout, but the rhetoric is mainstream). Or worse, denial of the Holocaust.

e. Include the Jewish American Experience as part of the Curriculum

Suggested curriculum – there is much out there that is available. The California State University system and the University of California have Jewish Studies programs. Certainly there are numerous across the country as well. I recommend that the state work with state and nationally respected scholars across various disciplines.

Why this is important:

Frankly, for all the reasons in the above topics, I was not satisfied with the exclusion of the Jewish American Experience after the initial draft curriculum or this one. However, now that the Education Secretary of State, outside the curriculum planning process, declared instruction on Arab/Muslim experience, the Jewish experience must be included. History, current hate data and general demographics supports this.

Again, according to demographic data, 15% of American Jews are of color and nearly half – 50% - of the global Jewish community are people of color, heavily represented from the Middle East and North Africa.

Jewish contributions are significant in this country.

The Jewish experience is a distinct and critical element of the ethnic studies experience – it is not all about tragedy and the Holocaust. Jews are a unique ethno-religious groups unlike any other. (Again, look at item #3 and Eric Ward's language) They are clearly an ethnic group - just look at all the genealogical and genetics research, including as profiled regularly on Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr's, a highly respected Harvard University African and African-American Studies scholar, PBS series, "Finding Your Roots."

Well represented in the state's Genocide Curriculum is the Holocaust. However, the Jewish experience should never be boiled down to this tragic chapter – which frankly, is still poorly taught and understood by most teachers and students.

Jews were able to thrive despite the challenges. They are a unique case-study that cannot be lumped in with other immigrant groups. The community's contributions are extensive – in the arts and sciences, law, civil, worker's, women's human rights, entertainment, politics, and

innovation, to name a few. California's first female senators are also Jewish. The sadness and reaction to the very recent passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg is a powerful example of this.

Because of personal experiences trying to break the discriminatory barriers, the Jewish community was active and vocal during the Civil Rights Era. Jews too, faced issues with immigration, housing, labor/employment and education, to name a few. Jews have created numerous organizations to help "repair" the world – to address pain and injustice because of the communities own personal experiences and driven by religious belief to do right. Again, important connections to the core four groups the curriculum focuses on.

Trivia - For example, did you know that the term Ghetto was first used in 16th century Italy to "ghettoize" the Jewish community there?

Lastly, there is a unique connection of this history because of the vast number of Holocaust survivors that settled in the United States and California. Understanding that the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust emerged from the delegitimization of Jews as a people and as humans. Ironically, nations across the world (including several in the Middle East) adopted anti-Semitic tropes and policies in the years leading up to and during World War II.

On a personal an emotional note on the importance of this curriculum...

- My then 15-year old daughter wears a *Kippah* (head covering) to public high school and faces horrible anti-Semitic comments – that "Jews deserve to die".
- That I have to ask my daughters if their Jewish friends wear any outwardly obvious religious garb and symbols out of concern they will be targets of hate?
- My 14-year old daughter is distraught at the virulent anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial she hears and reads on social media from strangers and fellow students alike?

The Holocaust is forever a reminder that words matter. Hateful words started in 1933. World II ended in 1945. And, the exclusion of experiences matter. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles – a resource you list - exists for this reason.

f. Arab-American Experience

State must ensure transparent process to allow the public and community groups to review proposed curriculum.

Curriculum should include reference to the expulsion of nearly 1 million Jews from Arab/Middle Eastern countries during the time of the establishment of Israel. For background knowledge, the documentary "The Forgotten Refugees" explains this refugee wave that emerged. Many of those Jews settled in California.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFa3diSHX8g&t=2s>

The establishment of Israel is important context because after the Holocaust and multi-millennia death, destruction of Jewish communities, proved that Jews need to have self-determination – a legal political right and voice on the global stage. Zionism is long held belief that Jews should have self-determination. That's it. Anti-Zionism is declared by mainstream organization as anti-Semitic. No country stood up for Jews during WWII.

g. Discussion of 1965 Immigration Act must include connect to earlier discriminatory immigration policies that directly and significantly impacted the Jewish community.

During the early 20th century, Jews from Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa were subject to quotas. At the time of Nazi Germany, refugees, most especially those needing protection, were unable to seek shelter in the United States.

On a personal note, this impacted my family during the 1920s and again in the 1960s before policies were revised.

h. Note about UC/Cal State Curriculum.

UC/Cal State Curriculum can be problematic as much of what I discuss. There are many topics/groups not included in the offerings in your proposed resources – it has the appearance of being selective. Instead, generic links, resources or just overarching ethnic group topics should be included.

I realize the state says that the examples were included verbatim, but there was clearly a selection process for inclusion/exclusion of topics. And it did include a topic on Jews benefiting from white privilege and a well written summary on the Arab American experience and NOT the Jewish American experience.

7. Guardrails

The state must explicitly ensure that any ethnic studies curriculum will not include anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, AND anti-Israel content, to include BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanction movement, recognized by mainstream organizations as anti-Semitic).

For local efforts that seek to go beyond the state's curriculum, the state should ensure that school districts create community workgroups that include parents, students, local civil rights organizations, religious/ethnic community and so forth. As well as, create process to receive input from the community and is transparent.

8. Recommendations - Strategic Outreach, Community Building and Future Commissions

- Consider LAUSD's curriculum which is well respected and well vetted. Los Angeles is the largest school district in the state and the second largest in the nation. And well understood to be highly diverse.
- To ensure the long-term success of ethnic studies effort, collaborate with experts in strategic communications, and savvy stakeholder consensus builders in the process. This was lacking from start to finish.
 - o Ideally, you would bring together leading civil rights, education groups representing Core 4 plus Jewish groups, etc in these efforts.
 - o Ethnic studies is not easily understood by the general public. And, teachers, parents, students, community members and administrators all may have different understanding of the terminology.
 - o I ask that the state work from an ethnic studies/multicultural mind-frame which is more inclusive and less alienating.
 - o Allow for meaningful input that shows a sincere, strategic effort of inclusion
- Ensure future work and processes are transparent, fair, balanced, involve input and contributions of experts from various fields. Involve other disciplines and most certainly involve respected generalists who can see the broader picture of the historical, political science, anthropological, etc, perspectives and hopefully avoid gaps and issues.

HIGHLIGHTS WORK/RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Yorba Linda, California/Washington, DC

Deputy Director, Nixon Presidential Library (Yorba Linda) /National Archives and Records Administration (Based in DC). Oversaw the entire operation of the museum, archives and facility. Because of work history, created partnerships and educational programs. Ensured access to archives and balanced presentation of history during the critically acclaimed \$15 million renovation. - 2013-2017 (left to retire on disability).

Below, in Washington, DC

-Director, Partner Relations Group, CMS (Medicare/Lead Agency for Affordable Health Care Act), Dept of Health and Human Services - Worked extensively with advocacy groups representing entire range of the disadvantaged to ensure access to healthcare. 2012-2013

-Director, Hispanic Outreach and Communications, US Dept of Education - initiated, managed groundbreaking, high-profile community and media outreach on entire education pipeline issues for the nation's second largest population. Worked extensively with local and national civil rights organizations and community organizations. Served on team with the White House Hispanic Initiative. Collaborated sister efforts AAPI Initiative, Historically Black College Initiative. Lead consultant to Univision's Gates Foundation funded national education campaign. 2009-2012

-Chief of Staff, presidentially appointed National Mathematics Advisory Panel, US Dept of Education. Consisted of 24 experts, reported 45 evidence-based findings and recommendations on how to improve mathematics achievement for all students. Panel governed by FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act which ensures transparency and fairness), 2006-2008.

-Producer, Education News You Can Use, Dept of Education & Team Member, Creative Services. Touched on almost every topic in public education, including character education, History/social studies, outreach to at-risk populations. Extensive work (100s of projects) in television productions, publications, events, webinars, and much more – all designed for parents, advocates, educators, and policy makers. 1998-2006.

Early Career Experiences

- Short-term positions/research in Washington, DC area: National Institutes of Health, NIDDK's equal employment office to focus on Latino/a recruitment; American History Smithsonian looking at "Ethnic Imagery" in American advertising; and Minority Business Administration (part of Dept of Commerce, position obtained through the Hispanic Assoc of Colleges and Universities). Summer Archival internship in Natchez, Mississippi where we preserved 19th cen. court records (lots naturally, involving slave economy).

BACKGROUND

BA, CSU Northridge and MA, University of Maryland College Park – both in American History.

Course work in ethnic identity and history, with heavy emphasis on the African-, Latino-, Asian- Jewish-, Native American experiences, along with the Holocaust, immigration, slavery, women, race/class, and so on. I am a generalist and have a broad understanding of these experiences.

Diverse Ethnic Heritage, Background and Experiences.

I am 100% Cuban, fluent in Spanish. 100% Jewish. Mother's side Sephardic (Spanish) Jews from Turkey. Permanently Disabled, retired from beloved career early. Mother of two school-age daughters. Married and living in Santa Ana, Orange County, California.