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Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission, SBE President
Darling-Hammond, and State Superintendent Thurmond,

After reviewing the newly proposed foundation for ethnic studies for California public schools, many of my original concerns remain. The curriculum excludes major representation of Black history, and seeks to, in an almost bullying fashion, colonize the minds of students. Pivotal Black American figures like John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are invisible or portrayed as “passive” and “docile,”¹ and ideologies like Marxism and Communism are elevated, promoted, and romanticized². The proposed curriculum makes no mention of Black community’s historic working partnership with Jews but instead elevates the voices of those who perpetuate anti-Jewish views.

One way the proposed curriculum seeks to colonize young minds is through the harmful indoctrination of our young black men and women. By celebrating Marxism and demonizing capitalism, the curriculum stunts the ability of our youth to thrive in America’s robust economy. Our youth should be encouraged to reflect on a range of perspectives, and develop confidence in their own analytic skills and abilities. They should study leaders who have excelled as creative problem solvers, not just as revolutionaries.

The problem of romanticizing Marxist heroes and the one-sided pro-militant version of Black experience was clearly evident in draft 1, and alluded to in draft 2, even though the specific “Figures of Significance” have been deleted. The Guiding Values and Principles² in draft 2 still promote Marxism and call capitalism a “form of power and oppression”,³ so the lessons and leaders will likely do the same. Many future paths should be shown as desirable for our students, not just those of the rebels. We want our young black men and women to master the skills and confidence needed to rise to the top in whatever fields they choose.

Furthermore, there is no mention in either draft of the Black-Jewish relationship; nothing about how linked the two communities were in our struggles, and our demonstrations of solidarity to one another, even to death. For example, there is no mention of the thousands of schools Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald built for Black students in the segregated South in the early 1900s; an act that spawned an entire generation of highly educated, successful Black Americans like the late Maya Angelou and the late Rep. John Lewis. The Ethnic Studies curriculum includes Black alliances

¹ Version 2, Appendix B, L. 679-680

² Version 2, Chapter 1, L.187–194 Guiding Values and Principles, and throughout the first draft

³ Version 2, Chapter 1, L. 187-188



with other ethnic groups; how strange that there is no mention of our long-standing partnership with the Jewish people.

The portrayal of Arabs themselves is another way this proposed curriculum seeks to colonize the young minds of students. With such an overrepresentation of Arab history in the first draft of curriculum, and a push for its inclusion in the second draft, one would think students would learn not only about Islamophobia, but also about the true history of Arab expansionism and brutal colonialism in Africa, including:

- Afro-Arab relationships in Africa have been mainly characterized by brutal wars, slavery, ethnic cleansing and destruction of indigenous cultures by the Arabs⁴
- Unlike European colonialism, Arab colonialism is still expanding. Native lands are stripped from indigenous hands and transferred to Arab custody. Sudan and Mauritania⁵ are among the examples in recent decades.
- Brutal violence, rape and killings of Black Africans by Arabs are exemplified by Boko Haram's bombings in Nigeria, and in Darfur, heavily armed gangs of Janjaweed, nomadic Arab militias "continue to massacre, plunder and rape in scorched-earth tactics."⁶

These pieces of oppression history, even the recent elements, are excluded from California's Ethnic Studies depiction, portraying Arabs instead as victims. This effort to get students to favor revisionist history is no doubt another form of colonization, as it clearly seeks to control the narrative, erasing certain sins from history, and fabricating others.

The portrayal of Arabs and Israel in the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Curriculum was also blatantly one-sided and lacking in historical accuracy. It promoted the hateful double standards in the BDS Movement with no mention of the indigenous nature of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, the Mizrahi Jewish community of the Middle East and North Africa, or the fact that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Levant region for 3000 years. These very important context clues were left out to tell a lopsided story and to create more anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiment.

This one-sided anti-Israel portrayal is less blatant but still present in draft 2. Students are indoctrinated via reference links and groups like Movement for Black Lives⁷, whose website is laced with erroneous, misleading statements to advance a BDS agenda. A subject such as the Israel-Palestinian issue has much complexity, and deserves to be handled as such if it is to be handled at all.

⁴ Chinweizu 2007 www.secularafrican.wordpress.com

⁵ "Among Mauritania's population of two million, 32% are free black Africans of Fulani, Soninke and Wolof ethnic origins, 28% are white Moors of Arab-Berber origin, 40% are black slaves (Abid or Haratin) belonging to the white Moors." Garba Diallo, 1993, "Mauritania – the other Apartheid"

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/world/middleeast/darfur-sudan.html>

⁷ Version 2, Appendix B, L. 348, 616, 621, 630-642



IBSI's number one priority is education, and in the name of education, we cannot sit idly by as this curriculum poisons our young minds. We urge you to significantly revise this draft, and create an environment wherein our young people can benefit and carry on the extraordinary legacy before us. We ask that you revise the principles and parts of resulting lessons in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum to deter K-12 courses from one-sided political proselytizing and a narrow unrepresentative portrayal of the Black Community. If an Arab section is included, it should be rewritten to faithfully reflect their actual history, including brutal colonization in Africa, not a misrepresentation as victims.

Significantly revising this curriculum is critical work. Our future and the future of our children depend on the decisions you make.

Sincerely,

Joshua Washington | Director of Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel