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December 26, 2020

California Department of Education
Instructional Quality Commission

RE: ESMC Third Field Review

Comment on: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Preface

Third Field Review Draft, pp. 3-4, lines: 40-45 (and footnote 1)

The language of objective 2 requires clear language as well as encouraging cultural understanding. However, the footnoted concept of race (footnote 1) fails to clearly express the dynamics of human behavior and reduces understanding to bright line stereotypes of intercultural behavior.

At a conference that I attended more than a dozen years ago (“White Studies” sponsored by Chicano and Black Studies, at UC Riverside), a professor of law at the University of Minnesota provided the following story (paraphrased): “I visited an African country and was met with curiosity about who I was. ‘What tribe are you a member of?’ I explained that I was a member of any tribe. The Africans persisted, ‘What tribe are you a member of?’ After several go arounds, I told them that I was an African-American. ‘Aha,’ came the response, ‘you are a member of the African-American tribe.’”

What this simple story underscores is that humans divide society into a host of ‘We vs. They’ groups: clans, lineages, tribes, caste, neighborhood, region, nation, affinity groups and yes, race. Social classification is not simply an Eurocentric invention, nor is it the only prevalent one in the United States. The immigrant experience speaks to the variety of ethnic groups that have come and continue to come in large numbers.

The notion of 'race' as discussed in footnote 1 is an important part of the discussion as it affects prejudice, but, as framed, it not only narrows the discussion of human difference but ignores the statistical changes taking place in society.

Moreover, in reviewing the proposed curriculum, one can assess whether encouraging cultural understanding is achieved by what role models are included and those excluded. Is Martin Luther King Jr. (whose is being honored with a national holiday) included as part of the curriculum or is he excluded for encouraging engagement rather than invidious comparisons of different ethnic groups? Clearly, there should be a discussion, but where? What about President Obama and his 2007 speech about getting to the Promised Land? Likely excluded since his view speaks to social change that does not fit within the footnote 1's narrow view of social relations in America: "racism/colorism/anti-Blackness/anti-Indigeneity and anti-racism/racial justice."

See my extended analysis as an example of a more robust discussion of the challenge of social change: *Getting to the Promised Land in Modern America*,

<https://timesofsandiego.com/opinion/2020/12/18/getting-to-the-promised-land-in-modern-america/>

What is also missing is a core notion of the changing dynamic of 'race' in modern America. Books such as Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste* illustrates this point. She discusses anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. An excellent example of how a discriminatory practice codified a hard edge to racial differences. However, Wilkerson fails to note that such laws were overturned more than 50 years ago by the United States Supreme Court in *Loving v Virginia* (see, *On this day in 1967: Loving v. Virginia and interracial marriage*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/12/politics/loving-v-virginia-interracial-marriage/index.html>)

This is where a statistical analysis is critical to an understanding of social change, going beyond the narratives, parables, stories, and chronicles that frame the critical race theory informing the ESMC. The pedagogic

framework can included such narratives from a broad array of experiences (not just negative ones), but they need to be tested against the experience and understanding of all Americans.

So, in the case of interracial marriage, five times the number of such marriages are interracial since 1967. And in terms of attitudes, the Gallup poll notes, "87% of Americans now favor marriage between blacks and whites, up from 4% in 1958." (*In U.S., 87% Approve of Black-White Marriage, vs. 4% in 1958* <https://news.gallup.com/poll/163697/approve-marriage-blacks-whites.aspx>)

The sense of possible and actual social change, including along the lines outlined in footnote 1) is absent.

The preface and the curriculum materials, if it is to encourage cultural understanding beyond lip service, should not merely mention the actual change taking place in America despite obvious failings but embed it in the core sensibility of what we are all trying to achieve for equality.

Sincerely,
Joseph Nalven, Ph.D. (Cultural Anthropology)

Proposed changes noted below

**Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum
Preface**

Third Field Review Draft

pp. 3-4, lines: 40-45 (and footnote 1)

(2) be written in language that is inclusive and supportive of multiple users, including teachers (single and multiple-subject), support staff, administrators, and the community, and encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together, highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as equality and equity, justice, race¹ and racism², ethnicity³ and bigotry, indigeneity, etc.,

Proposed Change to (2)

(2) be written in language, *both narrative and statistical*, that is inclusive and supportive of multiple users, including teachers (single and multiple-subject), support staff, administrators, and the community, and encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together, highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as equality and equity, justice, ethnicity, race and racism, tribalism, clan, caste, and affinity groups as well as *progress towards interracial attitudes and behavior, indigeneity*, etc.,

Original Footnote 1, 2,

Race: There are multiple definitions of race. One is that race is the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral differences. Genetic studies in the late 20th century refuted the existence of biogenetically distinct races, and scholars now argue that “races” are cultural interventions [inventions] reflecting specific attitudes and beliefs that were imposed on different populations in the wake of western European conquests beginning in the 15th century. Race, Human, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Audrey Smedley, July 28, 2020 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>, accessed 9/1/2020.

~~Within the field of ethnic studies, 'race' is defined as "a (neo)colonial social construction. It is viewed as a “master category” based upon a Eurocentric biological fallacy that is central to inequitable power relations in society. As a social and historical construct, the idea of race is primarily filtered through physical traits (phenotype), including pigmentation (skin color) and other physical features; where people's ancestral origins are from (precolonial geographic ancestry); cultural traits; and sometimes economic class. Since race produces material impacts, it also produces racial consciousness and facilitates the process of racialization and racial projects, including both the oppositional projects of racism/colorism/anti-Blackness/anti-Indigeneity and anti-racism/racial justice. The People of Color Power movements that emerged in the 1960s (“Black Power, Red Power, Brown Power, Yellow~~

Proposed Change to Footnote 1

1. Race: There are multiple definitions of race. One is that race is the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral differences. Genetic studies in the late 20th century refuted the existence of biogenetically distinct races, and scholars now argue that “races” are cultural interventions [inventions] reflecting specific attitudes and beliefs that were imposed on different populations in the wake of western European conquests beginning in the 15th century. Race, Human, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Audrey Smedley, July 28, 2020 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>, accessed 9/1/2020.

2. Ethnicity refers to the identification of a group based on a perceived cultural distinctiveness that makes the group into a “people.” This distinctiveness is believed to be expressed in language, music, values, art, styles, literature, family life, religion, ritual, food, etc. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethnicity>, accessed 12/26,2020.

Power”) are key examples of how race has also been embraced and leveraged in the resistance against racism; they are the movements that Ethnic Studies rose from. In the United States today, races very broadly break down as people of color (POC) and white people.” Cuauhtin, R. T., Zavala, M., Sleeter, C., & Au, W. (Eds.). (2018). *Rethinking Ethnic Studies* (1st edition). Milwaukee, OR: Rethinking Schools.

¹ Racism: a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

¹ Ethnicity: an identity marker based on ancestry, including nationality, lands/territory, regional culture, religion, language, history, tradition, etc., that comprise a social group.