

Comments by Richard Parenteau Aug 22, 2020 – email: [redacted]

This is my edited version of the similar comments by the organization “StandWithUs”

General Analysis (followed by specifics below)

While the new draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) is a step in the right direction, further changes must be made to address a number of significant problems that remain.

Key problems from the previous draft:

- Promoting [hate](#) and [one-sided narratives](#) against Jews and Israel.
- Excluding numerous ethnic groups, including Jews. For additional info see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).
- Pushing narrow, divisive political viewpoints rather than encouraging students to think critically and make up their own minds. For additional info see [here](#) and [here](#).

Examples of Positive Changes in the new draft (though there are intense efforts to reverse much of this progress)

- Explicitly anti-Israel and antisemitic content has been removed, although significant concerns remain about language and references in the new draft being used to justify teaching such bias regardless.
- New references to the American Jewish experience and antisemitism have been included, although they do not adequately represent the diversity of the Jewish community or educate about hatred against Jews in all its forms.
- Some guidance has been added that encourages teachers to expose students to “multiple and often competing sources of information,” and foster respect for diverse viewpoints. This should be expanded upon in the guiding values and principles and other parts of the curriculum.
- Strong language has been added urging school districts to be transparent and actively seek public input when they implement ethnic studies locally.

Examples of significant problems that still need to be addressed

- The guiding values and principles should be clarified and revised to encourage critical thinking, instead of enabling harmful political agendas. The “Guiding Values and Principles” of the ESMC directly reference and are based on specific pages from a book called *Education at War*. The relevant section of the book encourages teachers to “develop solidarity and create linkages” with anti-Zionism, BDS, and anti-Israel narratives. One of the ESMC's guiding values is connecting to “resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels” - language which can easily be twisted to justify promoting anti-Israel and antisemitic hate in the classroom.
- The last-minute addition of a lesson plan solely focused on Arab Americans is discriminatory and lacking in transparency. The curriculum should be inclusive of all [Middle Eastern communities in California](#), such as Jews, Iranians, Arabs, Kurds, Assyrian Christians, Coptic Christians, and others. There is no educational or moral

justification for favoring one of these communities over all others. The ESMC should be revised to add an inclusive unit about Middle Eastern Americans, which goes through the same vetting process as the rest of the curriculum.

- Existing references to American Jews should be edited to explicitly mention the experiences of Mizrahi Jews, Jews of color, Jews from the Former Soviet Union, and other Jewish communities in California whose stories are less widely acknowledged. Furthermore, a section should be added to the ESMC covering various forms of hate, including antisemitism across the political spectrum.
- There are numerous sections of the ESMC where it is essential to expand upon or reinforce the importance of exposing students to “multiple and often competing sources of information” and ensuring that “diverse viewpoints are respected”.

Positive additions to the ESMC

Chapter 2, Page 10, Lines 239-245:

Strong language added about transparency and public input regarding the development of local ethnic studies curriculums. This point should be strongly emphasized in communications about the ESMC.

Chapter 3, Page 5, Lines 108-112:

Crucial language added calling for students to be exposed to “multiple and often competing sources of information”. This point should be strongly emphasized in communications about the ESMC.

Chapter 3, Page 11, Lines 265-266:

Crucial language added urging educators to ensure that, “diverse viewpoints are respected”. This point should be strongly emphasized in communications about the ESMC.

Appendix C, Page 119, Lines 119-130:

Great resources from the Anti-Defamation League and Facing History and Ourselves have been added to the ESMC.

Positive additions to the ESMC that should be expanded upon in the next round of revisions

Chapter 3, Page 11, Lines 309-320:

Strong guidelines added about what teachers need in order to “effectively engage students in productive conversations and learning activities around difficult and important issues”. This section should be strengthened further by adding one more important point:

- *“Careful attention to their own political viewpoints and potential biases, to ensure students are empowered to form their own opinions rather than simply adopting the views of the teacher or particular educational materials.”*

Chapter 3, Page 29, Line 780:

The, “recent rise in anti-Semitic violence” has been added as a topic for study in the ESMC. This positive addition should be edited to say:

- “the recent rise in anti-Semitic violence, hatred, and rhetoric”.

Jewish students in California and Jews in general have also experienced a rise in antisemitic harassment, vandalism, discrimination, and rhetoric which may not fit within the category of “violence,” but should still be discussed.

Chapter 3, Page 31, Line 838-839:

The ESMC now includes “the effect that World War II and the Holocaust had upon the American Jewish population”. This positive addition should be broadened to be more representative of California’s diverse Jewish immigrant communities. The following language is an example of how to do this:

- “Another example is the American Jewish population, including those who immigrated to California from Europe after World War II and the Holocaust, from Arab states after facing escalating oppression and violence, from Iran after the Islamic Revolution, and from the former Soviet Union after a decades-long struggle to be granted the right to leave.”

Shortcomings which should be addressed and important guidance which should be added in the next round of revisions

Preface, Page 5, Lines 95-98:

The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) rightly fought for the just cause of including communities of color in higher education, and at the same time espoused deeply harmful ideas and ideologies in other areas. For example, one of the most prominent leaders of TWLF gave a [speech in 1968](#) in which he, “attacked Jewish people as exploiters of the Negroes in America and South Africa and called for ‘victory to the Arab people’ over Israel,” according to a news report from that period. TWLF also drew [significant inspiration](#) from Mao Zedong, the communist dictator of China who was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people. The State Board of Education’s General Principles should be revised to ensure the ESMC educates about the TWLF accurately and comprehensively, so students come away understanding that TWLF and other movements can promote good ideas about some issues and bad ideas about others.

Chapter 1, Page 9, Lines 179-194:

The “Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies” should be clarified and revised. For example, value and principle #6 is to “connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels”.

What is the definition of “resistance movements” in this section and which specific movements should teachers and students connect themselves to? The lack of clarity leaves the door open to interpretations that will be harmful when the ESMC is used in classrooms.

This concern is not simply theoretical. While the ESMC does not define the terms used in the “Guiding Values and Principles”, it does have footnotes showing where the language comes from. Footnote #20 references a chapter called *Pedagogies of Resistance*, from the book [Education at War](#). *Pedagogies of Resistance* includes a section titled “Connecting Ourselves to Historical and Contemporary Resistance Movements That Struggle for Social Justice on the Global and Local Levels,” which matches value and principle #6 in the ESMC.

Which “resistance movements” does it suggest teachers and students should connect themselves to? *Pedagogies of Resistance* explains that educators should “develop solidarity and create linkages,” with other movements, referring directly to works (*Maira and Shihade 2006 & Spade 2011*) which promote anti-Zionism, BDS and one-sided anti-Israel narratives (see below for details).

While this may have been unintentional, it is deeply problematic that the very Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC reference a book which promotes “solidarity and linkages” with anti-Zionism and BDS. The guiding values and principles should be revised to ensure that they cannot be used to justify promoting such hateful agendas in the classroom.

4. CONNECTING OURSELVES TO HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS THAT STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE ON THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Throughout the globe, there has been a long-standing history of resistance movements against imperialism and struggles for social justice (Espiritu 1992; Ho et al. 2000; Omatsu 2003a, 2003b). Locating our pedagogies as part of this legacy is necessary to develop solidarity and create linkages for deep systemic and transformative change (Maira and Shihade 2006, Spade 2011, Viola 2014). Acknowledging the many forms and acts of deimperialization also helps deessentialize activism and create stronger, more sustainable movements. We also need to put into question how we organize our communities for social change and the possibility that our methods and dogmatic tendencies can reassert the very imperialist structures we critique and work against. This by no means is claiming all structures should be denied but rather that the spotlight should be on the purpose of our structural and systematic choices. For example, engaging in critical praxis with our communities is similarly structured to the “scientific method,” but the purpose is about a pursuit of social justice (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008, Freire 1970). Connecting ourselves to resistance movements that struggle for social justice on both the global and local level also means that we commit to contribute our various expertise and talents to the development and livelihood of these movements.

Excerpt from Pedagogies of Resistance

- [Maira and Shihade 2006](#) calls Israel a “settler-colonial” state - terminology which erases over 3,000 years of Jewish history, identity, and rights in the historic home of the Jewish people. It also falsely accuses Israel of “annexation of the West Bank and Gaza” in 1967. In fact, Israel did not annex these territories after the 1967 War.

Most critically in regards to Principle #6, Maira and Shihade call for “Grappling with ways to connect anti-Zionism in the context of Middle East politics to anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements in the U.S.” That is, they advocate for connecting an ideology opposed to Israel’s existence with subjects covered in the ESMC.

Maira and Shihade also attack the ADL, an organization that the CDE has committed to partnering with on an antisemitism curriculum.

Lastly, Maira and Shihade tokenize a small minority of Jews in order to advance the notion that opposing Israel's existence is not a form of antisemitism. This erases the voices of the vast majority of Jews, who believe that opposing Israel's existence is, in fact, a form of antisemitism. Maira and Shihade attempt to use the framework of "anti-racism" and "anti-colonialism" to shield themselves and others from being criticized for rhetoric which denies the right of Jews to self-determination, while supporting that exact same right for Palestinians.

This approach fundamentally conflicts with Guiding Value and Principle #1: "cultivate empathy... self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants".

- [Spade 2011](#) promotes the "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israeli apartheid" - the type of one-sided anti-Israel advocacy that was widely criticized in the first draft of the ESMC.

Other parts of *Education at War* include additional one-sided references to Israel and public discourse about it.

The book refers to Israel as a "settler project" (p. 244) - terminology which erases over 3,000 years of Jewish history, identity, and rights in the historic home of the Jewish people.

Steven Salaita is described as innocently, "using Twitter to criticize Israel's 2014 siege on Gaza," in reference to numerous hateful statements he made, such as:

- "I think of all the pain Israelis have caused, their smugness, their greed, their violence, and yet I smile, because it's all only temporary."
- "Understand that whenever a Zionist frets about Palestinian violence, it is a projection of his own brute psyche."
- "I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing." (posted after three Israeli teens were kidnapped and murdered).

Such biased content should not be part of the reference point for the ESMC's Guiding Values and Principles.

Chapter 1, Page 9, Line 194:

Related to the previous comment, the pages in *Pedagogies of Resistance* referenced in Footnote #20 include the following line:

- "The United States *is* war. **Schools are battlefields where war is waged**, and the fight is between the imperial and the colonized, white supremacy and antiracism, and dominance and resistance."

Gestures of Rebellion: Pedagogies of Resistance on the Ground

The pillars of deimperialization as outlined in the previous section come together to form pedagogies of resistance. As mentioned earlier, resistance is central to the identities of Filipinas/os in the Philippines, United States, and global diaspora. Consider the following: The United States is war. Schools are battlefields where war is waged, and the fight is between the imperial and the colonized, white supremacy and antiracism, and dominance and resistance. These dialectical relationships began with invasion but were inevitably met with rebellion. As Paulo Freire (2004, 55) reminds us, “celebrate not the invasion but the rebellion against invasion.”

Motivated by the spirit of ethnic studies and radical social justice movements, Filipina/o Americans have “grown their own” critical counterspaces, their own “gestures of rebellion” responding to the conditions set by the (neo)colonial schooling apparatus. As a result,

Is this part of the vision that will now guide the ESMC and even the State of California’s education system?

If so, this should be clearly stated within the ESMC so that Californians can decide if we agree with this vision or not. If describing schools as “battlefields where war is waged” does not align with the ESMC’s values and goals, that should be clarified. This example illustrates the crucial importance of revising the “Guiding Values and Principles of Ethnic Studies”.

Chapter 1, Page 9, Lines 179-194:

The Guiding Values and Principles should be revised to include the following language:

- *At the college and university level, ethnic studies courses are sometimes taught from a specific political point of view. In K-12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically, and form their own opinions.*

Chapter 3, Page 7, Lines 177-196:

It is very important for this section to include clearer guidance about the role of educators in student community engagement projects. [LAUSD’s ethnic studies instructional materials](#) include valuable guidelines that should be incorporated:

- *“An ethnic studies course should provide students with depth of understanding in relation to ethnic and social issues, rather than promoting specific political activism, demonstration, protest or the like. Ethnic studies is a scientific inquiry of ethnic groups and their interrelations (Yang, 2010, pg. 14).”*
- *“An Ethnic Studies course:*
 - *Should include examples of civic engagement (e.g., voting and other peaceful social justice activities) and the impact they have had on United States history. Students who are considering volunteering, social justice activities, community engagement, etc., should consult with their school teacher/advisor and parents/guardians to evaluate that the activities are lawful, peaceful, and nonviolent. Further, students should be advised to promptly leave activities that differ or change from these expectations.*

- *“Whenever possible, should [create] opportunities for participation and for reflection on the responsibilities of citizens in a free society” (History Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, 2016, p. 19).”*

Chapter 3, Page 20, Lines 527-528:

“the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners” should be edited to specifically name other Middle Eastern immigrant populations that have [explicitly asked](#) for inclusion in the ESMC. This could be done as follows:

- “the unique experiences of *Middle Eastern populations such as Arabs, Mizrahi Jews, Iranians, Kurds, Coptic-Christians, Yezidis, and others*”

The Middle Eastern immigrant communities that have asked to be represented in the curriculum include:

- Mizrahi Jews
- Iranians
- Kurds
- Assyrian-Christians
- Coptic-Christians
- Yezidis
- Baha’is
- Zoroastrians

These diverse communities represent “an estimated combined total population of over 500,000, or at least 60%, of the Middle Eastern diasporic population in California”. They should not be simply lumped together using the term “other Middle Easterners”.

Overall, it is essential that these groups be represented on an equal basis with Arab Americans in the ESMC. Otherwise, the ESMC will unwittingly reproduce a long history and ongoing reality of imperialist oppression and erasure of non-Arab and non-Muslim ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East.

While it is good that “Assyrians and Jews” are mentioned in line 607 of this chapter, this is not sufficient because they are not identified as Middle Eastern immigrant communities or represented on an equal basis with Arab Americans.

Chapter 3, Page 26, Line 699:

The Introduction to Ethnic Studies Course Outline should be revised to include a section on different forms of hatred, including antisemitism in all its forms across the political spectrum. Content about antisemitism should draw from the following resources:

- [Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews, 9–12](#)
- [Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era](#)
- [Working Definition of Antisemitism](#)

Appendix A, Page 6, Line 8166-67:

While it is important to acknowledge the times when Jewish and Irish immigrants and their descendants faced significant discrimination, the following assignment is problematic for reason given below:

“Students will write a paper detailing certain events in American history that have led to Jewish and Irish Americans gaining racial privilege.”

- 1) The assumption in this sentence flattens out the Jewish experience in the U.S. by casting *all* Jews as white. This disregards the diversity within the American Jewish community, which includes Mizrahi Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, Iran and other Muslim majority states where Jews fled persecution. It also ignores Sephardic Jews, Black Jews, Latino Jews and the emerging Jewish-identified descendants of Spanish Jews whose ancestors were forced to convert to Christianity and flee the Inquisition.

The assignment would be better state as follows:

“Students will write a paper detailing certain events in American history that have led to some Jewish and Irish Americans gaining racial privilege, the paper will focus on variations in origin and heritage affecting the processes and outcomes.”

Appendix A, Page 6, Line 8159-69:

Given the problem listed in the previous comment, this should not be the only example of a unit covering the experiences of Jewish Americans that teachers have access to in the ESMC. At minimum, the following educational materials should be included or referenced in the curriculum:

- [Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews, 9–12](#)
- [Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era](#)
- [Working Definition of Antisemitism](#)

Appendix B, Page 6, Lines 113

A sample lesson should be added to reflect Sample Theme #1: Identity from the Introduction to Ethnic Studies Course Outline from Chapter 3. This would better equip teachers to empower students whose communities are not substantially represented in the ESMC.

Appendix B, Pages 10-16, Lines 216-346

The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) rightly fought for the just cause of including communities of color in higher education, and at the same time espoused deeply harmful ideas and ideologies in other areas. For example, one of the most prominent leaders of TWLF gave a [speech in 1968](#) in which he, “attacked Jewish people as exploiters of the Negroes in America and South Africa and called for ‘victory to the Arab people’ over Israel,” according to a news report from that period. TWLF also drew [significant inspiration](#) from Mao Zedong, the communist dictator who was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people. Sample Lesson 2 should be revised to educate about the TWLF

accurately and comprehensively, so students come away with an understanding that TWLF and other movements can promote good ideas about some issues and bad ideas about others.

Appendix B, Page 13, Lines 287-302:

This section should include references to Chapter 3, Page 5 where it says students should be exposed to “multiple and often competing sources of information”. It should also reference Chapter 3, Page 11 regarding respect for diverse viewpoints and guidelines to “effectively engage students in productive conversations and learning activities around difficult and important issues”.

These guidelines should be referenced specifically to address the possibility that a movement chosen by a teacher or student has faced criticism that students should consider, including from individuals, organizations, intellectuals, and leaders who are part of various ethnic minority groups.

Appendix B, Page 20, Lines 439-440:

The following question should be added, to fulfill the desired outcome of “making connections to the varying experiences of all students”:

- *Which groups have been harmed by housing discrimination and redlining in California?*

Appendix B, Page 28, Lines 632-633:

Numerous policy recommendations have been released by various groups within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which students could study to better understand BLM. Referencing the 2016 Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) policy platform alone would exclude other ideas and solutions that have been proposed. One example of the differences is that the M4BL platform was used by some activists to inject a one-sided anti-Israel agenda into BLM, while other BLM policy recommendations have not included this harmful bias. Including a wider variety of policy platforms and recommendations would help ensure that students are exposed to “multiple and often competing sources of information,” as stated in Chapter 3.

Appendix B, Page 41

Defining “interpersonal racism” as something only white people do would prevent a full understanding of interpersonal oppression and potentially decrease accountability for individuals from other communities who engage in various forms of interpersonal hate. For example, individuals from many different backgrounds engage in antisemitism targeting Jews from many different backgrounds. Language about racism by white people against people of color should certainly remain in this section, with edits to ensure that other forms of interpersonal hate are acknowledged as well.

Attachment 11: Additional CDE Recommendations

Adding a sample lesson solely focused on Arab American Studies would exclude diverse communities which represent at least 60% of Middle Eastern Americans in California. CDE

should change its recommendation to add an inclusive unit about Middle Eastern Americans, including Arabs, Iranians, Jews, Kurds, Assyrian Christians, and others. This unit should include the course outline "[Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews, 9–12](#)." There is no educational or moral justification for favoring one Middle Eastern community over all others.