

From: Cynthia Levinson
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 2:13 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: [email redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerns with the second draft of ECMS

August 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

I appreciate some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), but I am upset by the imposition of the offensive, one-sided political ideology that still remains in this flawed draft of California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Here are my major concerns:

- Misrepresentation of Jews as privileged white colonialists. **Regarding "Privileged,"** Jews have suffered from bigotry and hatred in every generation in America and around the world. Since being exiled from their native homeland by the Romans, Jews have been dispersed all around the world as a people without a country. They were victimized by the Crusades, the Inquisition, sprees of conversion by sword, multiple Expulsions, Pogroms, and attempted Geocide. In the US, white nationalists are as hateful of Jews as they are of any other people of color. Where redlining and other post-Jim Crowe discrimination occurred against blacks and other minorities, it occurred against Jews as well. This is what led to the true partnership between Blacks and Jews during the Civil Rights Movement. Jews could empathize with the suffering of the Black community because of what they too had suffered. **Regarding "white,"** some Jews look European, but due to the exile and dispersion of the Jewish population around the world, there are Jews reflecting a vast array of ethnicities and complexions: Persian Jews, North African Jews (including Egyptian Jews), Middle Eastern Jews. Even Jews from Europe are only only "white," until they are not – until anti-Semitism raises its ugly head again. **Regarding "colonists,"** Muslim conquest of the entire Middle East is accepted outright and without judgement, but Jews attempting to regain and maintain their tiny little historic homeland is characterized as apartheid. These three assumptions (that Jews are privileged, white, and colonialists) form the base of BDS anti-Israel philosophies. Any and all references to such philosophies and teachings need to be removed from every part of the curriculum.
- The "Guiding Values and Principles" of the ESMC directly reference and are partly based on specific pages from a book called *Education at War*. The relevant section of the book effectively encourages teachers to "develop solidarity and create linkages" with anti-Zionism, BDS, and anti-Israel narratives. The guiding values and principles should be revised to ensure that they cannot be used to justify promoting such hateful agendas in the classroom.

The relevant section of *Education at War* also states, "Schools are battlefields where war is waged..."

- Based on the problematic “Guiding Values and Principles,” the ESMC promotes and romanticizes specific political ideologies with no counterbalancing perspective. Guidelines should be added, and the sample lessons revised, to ensure that ethnic studies courses focus on a thorough understanding about ethnic groups, social issues, and civic engagement, without political proselytizing. A cursory look at the bibliography reveals a preponderance of the proselytizing version of Ethnic Studies authors (Cuauhtin, Tintiangco-Cubales, Sleeter), combined with the glaring omission of the seminal texts of the balanced version of the subject (Takaki, Shaefer, Banks).
- The experiences of Mizrahi Jews, Iranians, Kurds, Assyrian-Christians and other immigrant communities must be represented on an equal basis with Arab Americans in the ESMC. They should not be simply lumped together as, “Arab Americans and other Middle Easterners”. The current language unwittingly reflects 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.

I am a Californian, and I realize the vital importance of reflecting the history and experience of the many ethnic groups that make up our state, but this proposed curriculum really misses the mark.

The anti-Semitic philosophes of BDS first invaded university campuses, and now they are threatening to invade California’s curriculum. They have also invaded organizations that support otherwise very important causes, such as BLM. So, even though explicitly antisemitic slurs have been removed from the ESMC, anti-Zionist references still remain in footnotes, in links, and in the bibliography.

- The BLM lesson in the African American section lists the following as THE resource: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/bringing-black-lives-matter-into-the-classroom-part-ii>
In it, Palestine equated with South Africa and Stonewall. This is the same article that describes non-violent civil rights leaders as "passive" and "docile" and considers Black Panthers to be "heroes."
- Appendix B includes a detailed three and a half page lesson on Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). M4BL is an aggressively pro-BDS lobbying group (a separate entity from Black Lives Matter). M4BL’s web site calls Israel "an apartheid state" and blames Israel for "the genocide taking place against the Palestinian people."
- There are links to the M4BL web site in the curriculum, and directions to delve into the key organizations that comprise it. Some are quite concerning, such as www.bdsmovement.net and www.blackpalestiniansolidarity.com.
- Also concerning is the direct assignment in ESMC Appendix B lines 630 -633 to research M4BL's policy platforms, tactics and key incidents the movement has responded to. That's a direct call for BDS and anti Israel rhetoric, including cutting off US funds to Israel and fighting anti-BDS bills among other anti-Israel policies

- Appendix A lists a course with the following lesson plan: “Students will write a paper detailing certain events in American history that have led to Jewish and Irish Americans gaining racial privilege. They will be asked to think critically about why and who is allowing this evolution in white identity.” Among the many issues with this assignment is that it, in itself, can be considered anti-Semitic.
- One of the approved courses in Appendix A uses a text with Amal Amireh’s essay Palestinian Women’s Disappearing Act: The Suicide Bomber Through Western Feminist Eyes.’
<https://serendipstudio.org/oneworld/system/files/AmirehPalestinianWomen.pdf>
- One of the approved courses in Appendix A uses Rabab Abdulhadi's textbook. See this sample Abdulhadi [FB post](#).

I urge you to make significant further revisions to the ESMC to address these concerns. Please revise the Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC to use more precise and inclusive terminology, to align with the ESMC Guidelines, to build bridges of intergroup understanding, and to ensure critical thinking. Then adjust the lessons and sample topics accordingly to match the revised principles.

Thank you,

Cynthia Levinson

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