

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

MARCY WINOGRAD

06.03.2025

California Teachers Fight Palestine Censorship



Image by Yunus Tuğ.

As the Trump administration engages in a frontal assault on the teaching of race and ethnicity at the K-12 level, a quieter but no less important battle is shaping up in deep blue California. Communities of color are mobilizing statewide to defeat AB 1468, the latest bill to emerge from the CA Legislative Jewish Caucus (LJC) in its campaign to censor Palestinian voices in ethnic studies classes, and police all ethnic studies content along with it.

Although the words “Gaza,” “Palestine” and “Israel” are nowhere to be found in the proposed legislation, the language of AB 1468 restricts the discipline to the “domestic experience” of “marginalized people” to discourage teachers from developing lessons on the impact of Israeli settler colonialism on Palestinian American and Muslim communities. AB 1468’s focus on the “domestic experience” might likewise inhibit classroom discussion of US trade policies that increase immigration at the southern border or transnational resistance to oil drilling that disproportionately harms communities of color from the global south to the Los

Angeles harbor, or even discussion of state reparations for Black descendants of enslaved African peoples.

“Students fighting for ethnic studies in the late 1960s didn’t view themselves as a domestic minority, but part of a global majority,” says Christine Hong, a professor of ethnic studies at UC Santa Cruz and member of the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council. “During the U.S. war in Vietnam, they saw the connection between here and there, between cause and effect, and understood that marginalization and racism cannot be geographically enclosed within this country’s borders.”

The UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council, which represents 300 ethnic studies practitioners, calls for broad public education on the possible consequences of AB 1468, suggesting it would not only censor education to whitewash history, but also increase state bureaucracy, undermine local school district authority over curriculum, and burden the state with unnecessary costs.

The Council on Islamic-American Relations (CAIR) describes the bill as “part of a broader right-wing effort to suppress discussions on race, history, and global justice” that if passed would dangerously “place curriculum decisions in the hands of politicians instead of educators.” Other opponents of the bill include Jewish Voice for Peace-Bay Area (JVP-Bay Area), Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMC), American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC), Palestine Solidarity Coalition, and CODEPINK-Central Coast.

Sponsored by Senator Rick Zbur (D-Los Angeles), Assemblywoman Dawn Addis (D-Morro Bay), and Senator Josh Becker (D-Menlo Park), the bill has a total of 31 co-sponsors—over a fourth of the state legislature. Seventeen of its co-sponsors are members of the Legislative Jewish Caucus (LJC).

The California Legislative Black Caucus has unanimously refrained from sponsoring AB 1468, and the California Faculty Association (CFA) has emphasized “when a discipline that focuses on communities of color comes under this kind of policing, the racist implications are clear.”

The bill, however, faces fierce opposition within the ranks of the 300,000 strong California Teachers Association (CTA). In 2024 CTA’s opposition to similar Zbur-Addis legislation in the Senate Appropriation Committee caused the authors to withdraw their bill. Had that prior bill become law, it would have erected steeplechase obstacles to the development of local ethnic studies lessons, e.g., a San Diego unit on Haitian Americans subjected to anti-

immigrant rhetoric, or a San Francisco unit on Native Hawaiians protesting a telescope project on sacred land in Hawaii.

This new bill would require the CA Department of Education to seek input from the 18-member Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) on uniform standards for ethnic studies across non-uniform academic disciplines; conduct regional hearings on proposed standards to be adopted by 2028; monitor or “surveil” and report on instruction in ethnic studies for the next five years and require submission of local ethnic studies curriculum to the State Board of Education 60 days prior to local school district public hearings on approval. Opponents of the bill say this would constitute an unprecedented and costly infringement on local control.

AB 1468 states the intent is to establish an advisory committee of ethnic studies experts in a subsequent bill, but for now the job of developing standards and instructional materials would fall to the ICQ non-experts, including Senator Ben Allen, a member of the Legislative Jewish Caucus and a co-sponsor of AB 1468, as well as Anita Friedman, who is a former board trustee of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and leader of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). She is also executive director of the pro-Israel Jewish Family Children’s Services (JFCS), an organization spearheading the California Teachers Collaborative on Holocaust and Genocide Education—a state-funded teacher training cadre that excludes Palestinian scholars on Israel’s genocide in Gaza and promotes the Anti-Defamation League’s conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism.

Both Senator Allen (then-chair of the LJC) and JFCS Friedman were also part of the IQC in 2021, recommending line item edits and participating in the unanimous vote to approve the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (CA ESMC) for state adoption.

The Jewish Public Affairs Committee (JPAC), which previously attacked the ESMC, is the power behind AB 1468. Boasting it “leads a coalition of over 35 Jewish organizations that have lobbied tirelessly for standardization of the ethnic studies ... to ensure there is a comprehensive, lasting solution to the ongoing issue of antisemitism in California classrooms,” JPAC is hardly a neutral player. On its website, JPAC indicates that its purpose is to “Encourage and foster cooperation – at the State level and among citizens – between the State of Israel and the State of California” and “Combat campaigns to delegitimize and demonize Israel, including the Boycott Divestment Sanctions Movement (BDS).” Crucially, however, JPAC’s expansive definition of antisemitism includes not only discrimination against Jews and Holocaust denial, but also content critical of Israel. JPAC’s proposed ban on anti-Israel content would contradict 10th grade California social science standards that

address the rise of nationalism in the Middle East and the “significance and effects of the location and establishment of Israel on world affairs.”

Senator Becker’s press release insists the bill will “protect students from inaccurate or biased information taught in their classrooms,” though Jewish Voice for Peace activists argue that “guardrails” prohibiting discussion of Israel’s occupation of Palestine or genocide in Gaza reflect a special interest bias in favor of an apartheid state. “Pro-Israel organizations are using false claims to suppress debate over the conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism—over the difference between bigotry against Jews and rejection of a racist nationalist Jewish state,” says Seth Morrison, an organizer with the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Peace, one of the fastest growing Jewish organizations in the US.

Standards confusion

In defense of the bill, Addis, a former special education teacher, argues “strong clear standards will prevent hate from taking root.” Ethnic studies as a discipline, however, has never been about “hate” but rather about providing students with the tools to not only tell their own stories, but also critically examine the society in which they live. At the current moment, such tools are more vital than ever.

The mandate for uniform teaching standards may sound reasonable at first blush, but a more studied look suggests the bill’s authors need to go back to class to learn more about ethnic studies.

After [AB 101](#) was signed into law in 2021, the California Department of Education adopted an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum ([ESMC](#)) with sample lesson plans, instructional resources and guiding principles that encourage students to “challenge racist, bigoted and discriminatory colonial beliefs on multiple levels” and “connect ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice.” School districts were given the option to use the state curriculum and its guiding values and principles or develop their own ethnic studies curriculum tailored to address their local ethnic communities.

Under state law, ethnic studies can be taught incorporating English language arts standards in individual courses on African Americans or Chicanx/Latinx or Native Americans or Asian American/Pacific Islanders—or in a combined course on all four ethnic populations—or in an A-G course, such as English—or history, science or math, in which content is taught through the lens of marginalized communities in a class with content-specific standards.

If the bill’s sponsors intend to mandate only one set of ethnic studies standards for stand alone ethnic studies courses and for every level of math (algebra, geometry, calculus), science (biology, chemistry, physics) and social sciences (US history, government, economics), the

near-impossible task of developing one-size fits all standards could stretch long past 2030, the date the law sets for ethnic studies to become a graduation requirement.

Ethnic studies scholars argue that instead of pushing for uniform standards, legislators should support rigorous criteria for ethnic studies courses to meet university entrance requirements. Currently, A-G ethnic studies, a proposed new ethnic studies requirement for entry into the University of California, is undergoing review by the UC Academic Senate. The UC's proposed criteria include a focus on ethnic studies pedagogy, critical and intersectional analysis, struggles of Indigenous peoples and communities of color, examination of power, racial justice, and civic engagement.

Dummying down

Opponents of the bill object to its “anti-intellectual” language.

AB 1468 bill states “the goal should not be to understand abstract ideological theories, causes or pedagogies which then filter or limit the breadth of an ethnic group’s experience.”

“All academic disciplines are based on theories and pedagogies,” says Theresa Montaña, professor of Chicana/o Studies and activist with the California Faculty Association. “To deny the teaching of critical concepts, ideological theories, and pedagogies violates the principle of academic freedom and is plainly racist.”

To share the stories of marginalized communities without exploring the causes of their marginalization also suggests social science teachers should disregard the California Department of Education’s social science framework that states students will “understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence and correlation in historical events, including the long-and-short term causal relations.”

Why ethnic studies?

In the introduction to the state ethnic studies curriculum, members of the state board of education led by President Linda Darling-Hammond highlight the positive impact of ethnic studies on student success, referencing research by Christine E. Sleeter and Miguel Zavala, co-authors of the book, *Transformative Ethnic Studies in Schools: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Research* (2/7/20. Teachers College Press). In summarizing the research, authors of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum write, “instruction that includes diversity experiences and a specific focus on racism and other forms of bigotry has a positive impact, such as “democracy outcomes” and higher-level thinking.”

Additional research in 2021 conducted at Stanford University, in conjunction with the San Francisco Unified School District, revealed that students assigned to an ethnic studies course in 9th grade were more likely to attend school, graduate and enroll in college.

Darlene Lee, a UCLA lecturer in ethnic studies teacher education, conducted a search of UC's A-G requirement database. Lee found that 1,366 of the state's 1,556 high schools have an approved A-G ethnic studies course ahead of the 2026 deadline for high schools to offer such a course.

The history of ethnic studies in California has multiple origins. It can be traced back to 1968 when high school students in East LA walked out to demand curriculum reflect the contributions of Mexican Americans to US society. That same year, historic student protests under the banner of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State led to the lengthiest student strike in U.S. history. Students boycotted class for half the school year until the administration met their demands, including "a curriculum that would embrace the history of all people, including ethnic minorities." When the TWLF pressed similar demands at UC Berkeley, "the UC administration and the State of California violently opposed the TWLF to the point where Governor Ronald Reagan declared "a state of extreme emergency" at UC Berkeley, with unprecedented constant sweeps and tear-gassing ... " (MESC)

"The kids love the class."

Lourdes Barraza is a parent of two teens enrolled in ethnic studies in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in Santa Cruz County. "Legislators like Addis disguise their intent with words like 'standards' when their real agenda is to police people's stories," says Barraza, a strong supporter of the existing ethnic studies guiding principles enshrined in the adopted state model curriculum. Rather than impose more costs on the state with a pricey bureaucracy to shuffle papers and dummy down curriculum, Barraza wishes the sponsors of AB 1468 would demand Governor Newsom fund ethnic studies to honor the intent of AB 101. "The kids love this class," says Barraza, adding, "It's the one class kids never want to miss, so we are fighting for state funding."

Barraza's 14-year-old daughter Ixel speaks enthusiastically about her next ethnic studies class-chosen research project—the local school board and its impact on the education of her largely Latinx high school. Barraza's 16-year-old son Maximilliano, also enrolled in an ethnic studies course, says, "My favorite project was telling a story about ourselves that highlighted how we changed and how we reflected on that pivotal experience. We could choose to present our story to the whole class or not and most students chose to present—which showed how much trust the class had built between students."

Yes, student stories lie at the core of ethnic studies, which affirms student identities, experiences and histories, domestic and transnational. To deny those histories, to exclude academic inquiry into systems of power—white supremacy, colonialism, and imperialism—

that influenced those histories is to rob students of their past, to deny them the knowledge they need to understand their present and to undermine their future ability to create a more loving society.

For this reason, communities of color call for the defeat of AB 1468, a bill they describe as “undeniably paternalistic, hostile, and racist.”

Guiding Principles for Ethnic Studies (CDE ESMC)

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity,²⁰ self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth
3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge,²¹ narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society
4. Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression²²
5. Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels.
6. Connect ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice and an equitable and democratic society, and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic-racism society that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

Marcy Winograd is a retired public high school teacher and literacy coach who taught English and social studies in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is also the coordinator of CODEPINK Congress, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace and co-chair of the Central Coast Antiwar Coalition based in Santa Barbara, California.

MARCH 5, 2025