



May 15, 2024

Re: Call to Pause PAUSD's Ethnic Studies Rollout

Dear Superintendent Austin and PAUSD Trustees,

We, community members and students, appreciate that PAUSD is tackling the update to our district's current Ethnic Studies course.

Lacking, however, is the required transparency and community input that has resulted in PAUSD embracing highly controversial and divisive "liberated" Ethnic Studies. As a result, we urge PAUSD to pause this Ethnic Studies rollout and continue to use its existing well-liked and UC-approved Ethnic Studies course while the necessary steps are taken to get meaningful input. These steps will lead to a required Ethnic Studies course our students will be excited to take and our community will support.

A. Call for Board-required transparency and community input on PAUSD's Ethnic Studies rollout

Just as the PAUSD Promise calls to "increase family and community partnerships/engagement," the CA State Board of Education calls for transparency and community partnerships when developing an Ethnic Studies course.ⁱ In addition, PAUSD Board policies require content standards for district courses be developed with community input and board oversight.ⁱⁱ

The needs for transparency and community partnership are especially significant here because of the widely disparate Ethnic Studies approaches that districts could adopt. The approach that PAUSD chooses to teach is important since divisiveness and turmoil have ensued in the school district boardrooms and classrooms that embraced "liberated" Ethnic Studies. (For a primer on the key differences between "liberated" and inclusive Ethnic Studies, please read former California Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig's EdSource [article](#) that Dr. Lopez cited in his Ethnic Studies presentation to the board.)

Last September, Dr. Austin assured the community and students that the "next steps include seeking student and community feedback on the course." Yet in March, six months later, Dr. Lopez acknowledged that the Ethnic Studies course development was already well underway. He added that PAUSD, however, is "not there yet" on gathering community input. On April 9, the Ethnic Studies Committee hosted a poorly advertised community meeting that few attended. There Dr. Lopez said that most of the community's concerns would be addressed at a later date.

At the March 26 board meeting, student board representatives and community members pushed for the transparency and partnerships that have been missing. Student Board

representatives Chris Lee (Gunn) and Karthi Gottipati (Paly) urged staff to be forthcoming, with Gottipati adding that he is “worried” about the proposed course’s focus on “power” and “systems of oppression.” It is “super-important,” Gottipati told the board, to talk to students *before* requiring them to master these to graduate.

Yet Dr. Lopez and seven PAUSD staff members have already selected the course’s [key concepts and framing](#) as well as hired the [UC Berkeley History-Social Science Project \(HSSP\)](#) to further develop its foundational concepts and essential understandings without transparency and without the required input and board approval.ⁱⁱⁱ

B. Concern about PAUSD’s embrace of a “liberated” Ethnic Studies frame and consultant

Unfortunately, both the Ethnic Studies course outline already developed and consultant PAUSD staff selected employ the [highly controversial](#) “liberated” Ethnic Studies frame. This is in sharp contrast to what the [California Legislature intended](#) and how Dr. Austin described the course: an “exploration into the diverse histories and experiences of various ethnic groups.”

Following are examples of the “liberated” framing promoted by HSSP:

- HSSP’s Ethnic Studies lessons include students addressing how the police have mistreated them and writing manifestos using armed, race-based separatist groups’ manifestos as their model.
- HSSP’s Ethnic Studies Initiative’s logo is a [tombstone](#) etched “herein lyeth buried capitalism and control.” Its “essential” curriculum includes:
 - The seminal “liberated” Ethnic Studies book [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#). This book calls for an all-of-society “cultural revolution” instructing readers that “revolutionary leaders’ [world] ‘involves...gunpowder.’”
 - “[Key Concepts](#)” that tag White males as privileged, Western society as oppressive, and decolonization -- the desired outcome -- as unlearning one’s religion and family and social structures, as well as changing the way one learns.
 - The Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Coalition’s ([LESMC](#)) curricula. LESMC is the private Ethnic Studies consultancy firm started by the people the State of California essentially [fired](#) in 2019 due to the radical, political, and discriminatory model Ethnic Studies curriculum they recommended the State adopt which raised the ire of Governor Newsom, the State Board of Education, and the public throughout the State.

See Appendix for additional examples.

C. Urge PAUSD to pause this Ethnic Studies rollout and use its existing well-liked and UC-approved Ethnic Studies course until these issues are addressed

For these reasons, we urge you Dr. Austin and Board members to pause the Ethnic Studies roll-out, provide the required transparency, and get our students and community's input first. This will:

1. Get PAUSD the Ethnic Studies course the State Legislature expected and our community and students support: one with inclusiveness and equity at its core that focuses on multiple cultures' assets and contributions (AB 2016).
2. Avoid the Ethnic Studies controversies plaguing Sequoia Union, Mountain View-Los Altos, and Berkeley Unified, all on the receiving end of legal complaints and formal investigations after adopting the highly controversial "liberated" Ethnic Studies that HSSP promotes.

Fortunately, PAUSD's current [University of California A-G approved](#) Ethnic Studies course is well-liked and complies with the Ethnic Studies law (AB 101).^{iv}

PAUSD can proceed with its new graduation requirement timeline using that course as a placeholder AND take time for our staff, students, and community to provide input and get PAUSD a refreshed Ethnic Studies course that we want for our students.

Thank you,

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ⁱ CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, Chapter 2, pages 24-31 (2021).

ⁱⁱ PAUSD Board Policies 6000, 6011 and 6141. See *also* PAUSD 2023-24 LCAP ("high quality education" involves standards-aligned professional development and instructional materials).

ⁱⁱⁱ CA Education Code Section 17605, PAUSD Board Policy 3300, and PAUSD Resolution 2022-23.01.

^{iv} CA Education Code Section 51225.3(a)(1)(G)(ii)(II)

Appendix

UC Berkeley History-Social Science Project (HSSP)

Executive Director Jason Muniz

--founding member of the UC Berkeley High School Ethnic Studies Initiative--

Examples of HSSP's Ethnic Studies Lessons



[Lesson](#) "Manifestos for a Just Society"

Assignment: "write a justice manifesto expressing your aspirations for a just society"

Models include:

- "[Black Panther Party 10 Point Program](#)...we want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent [morals and a great love of pleasure, money, fame] American society"
- "[Yellow Power](#)...a call for all Asian Americans to end the silence that has condemned us to suffer in this racist society and to unite with our Black, Brown, and Red brothers of the Third World for survival, self-determination, and the creation of a more humanistic society"
- "[El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan](#) ... raised the concept of Aztlan, a Chicano nation...to achieve the goal of self-determination ...an independent political party with Raza nationalism as its 'common denominator'"
- "[Young Lords 13 Point Program](#) ...we oppose capitalists...we oppose the AmeriKKkan Military...we believe armed self-defense and armed struggle are the only means to liberation...we want a socialist society"



[Lesson](#) "#BlackLivesMatter: Organizing Against Police Violence Over Time"

All-class exercise: "stand if you or someone you know has been mistreated by the police" with warning that content can be divisive and traumatic so require additional student support:

"We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society." – *from assigned reading the "Black Panther Party 10 Point Program"*

On "pigs" [the police], Black Panther Huey Newton "jacked a round off into the chamber of his eighteen-inch shotgun...educating the people that we would die here for them" and organized a rally "to tell the people it was necessary for us to arm ourselves for self-defense" -- *from Black Panther Bobby Seale memoir "Seize the Time"*



teenVOGUE

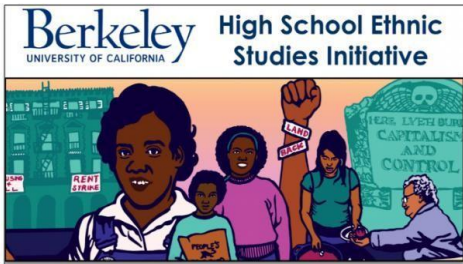
Lesson: "Introduction to Settler Colonialism"

Assignment: "A just future: what will a future that reverses manifest destiny look like?"

"Settler Colonialism. The United States is described as a settler colonial nation."

Resource: "Colonialism is when one country violently invades and takes control of another country, claims the land as its own, and sends people — 'settlers' — to live on that land...The Europeans ... believed it was their Manifest Destiny... to claim [North America] territory...indigenous peoples have risen up and successfully overthrown colonial powers, demonstrating that while colonizers could steal land and resources, they could not take the dignity of a people determined to be free."—from assigned Teen Vogue "Colonialism Explained"

UC Berkeley High School Ethnic Studies Initiative (HSESI)



Cover graphic:

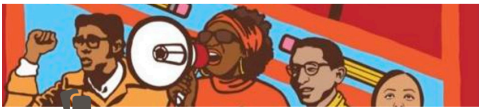
"Here Lyeth Buried Capitalism and Control" -- gravestone epitaph

"Land back" -- bracelet under student's raised fist

Examples from HSESI's Resource Hub

The Resource Hub "aims to foster a deep understanding of oppression, liberation and... social movements"

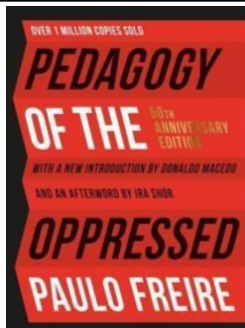
Under the Hub's "Curriculum Essentials: Critical resources for Ethnic Studies teaching"



Ethnic Studies Key Concepts & Definitions Activity

Key Concepts include:

- "Privilege...tied to power...i.e. white, male"
- "Systems of Oppression...White Eurocentric/Western supremacy...that keep communities of color marginalized"
- "Settler Colonialism...the type of colonialism being practiced in the Americas"
- "Decolonization...unlearn the ideas imposed ...by systems and structures that are the product of European colonization (religion, construction of knowledge, family structures, social structure)"


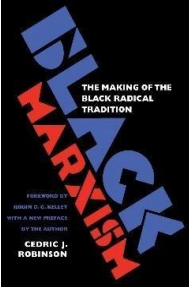





Book calls for a "cultural revolution' [that] takes the total of society to be reconstructed, including all human activities, as the object of its remolding action [for] everyone"

"The oppressors...exploit, and rape by virtue of their power"

Political "revolutionary leaders ...name the world" citing Cuban Orlando Ortiz for "the revolution involves...word, people, and gunpowder"

(Paolo Freire, [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#))

 <p>LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES</p> <p>Liberated Ethnic Studies - Model Curriculum Consortium</p> <p>Areas of Study: Geography, Support & Insight, Instructional Design, ES Curriculum Essentials</p>	<p>Its extensive curriculum on four ethnic groups focuses on systems of oppression, solidarity, resistance, and power.</p> <p>A solidarity lesson heralds a White man who butchered slave owners in front of their children and was sentenced to death for his crime. Students learn that “it takes conscious work to become anti-racist activists, to decide to give your life to liberate others ...a light to purification”</p> <p>(LESMC, “<i>John Brown</i>” Lesson)</p>
	<p>The “significant and immanent mode” of Black’s “revolutionary change” is based on Marxism and African and Western Black resistance history.</p> <p>(Robinson, Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition)</p>
<p>Under the Hub’s “Solidarity-Based Action: social and racial justice initiatives, fostering active awareness and engagement.”</p>	
	<p>Defund the Police</p>
<p>Under the Hub’s “Community Resources”</p>	
 <p>video</p>	<p>To “provide insights on incorporating the [Black Panther] Party’s history and enduring lessons into ...Ethnic Studies courses”</p> <p>Shared resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The Revolution Has Come” “Black Against Empire” “Comrade Sisters” <p>(HSESI Scholar Series, “Teaching the Black Panther Party Legacy”)</p>
 <p>video</p>	<p>The aim is “reclaiming the radical, revolutionary history...of Ethnic Studies”—<i>featured speaker Resistance Studies Professor Jason Ferreira</i></p> <p>Solidarity movements highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cuban/Castro Argentinian/ Che Guevara Mexican/Flores Magnon Filipino/Kabataan Makabayan and KDP (Union of Democratic Filipinos) North Vietnamese Palestinian Native American/Red Nation, and Black Power/Malcolm X and Black Panther Party. <p>(HSESI Scholar Series, “Teaching Histories of Anti-Imperialist Solidarity”)</p>