
AFFIRMING IDENTITY

While raising the voices and experiences of the four core groups, ethnic studies is not intended to silence other voices. Many students have experienced some type of othering, whether individually or collectively with their community. Intersectional identities heighten the possibility that different elements of one's identity will make such experiences even more likely.

You may have students in your class who do not identify with the groups at the core of the ethnic studies curriculum. The lessons here can help you provide identity-affirming moments in your class and help students connect their own identities and experiences with the themes of the course. These lessons do not replace the core curriculum, but provide avenues to enter and expand upon the themes in the core curriculum. In particular, these lessons provide students opportunities to

- explore parallel experiences and connections between populations;
- look for commonalities and related strengths across groups;
- identify points of contact between groups, including tension points and resolutions; and
- allow all students to see their own identity affirmed such that the curriculum can move away from a sense of competition between groups and toward compassion for each other.

As an example, the lesson “Armenian Migration Stories and Oral History” presents a window into one particular community's story of living in diaspora, while also serving as a mirror for considering migration experienced by others. The Armenian community in California grew over the course of the twentieth century as thousands of Armenians fled violence in their home country. The Hamidian massacres, the Armenian Genocide during World War I, the escape from Soviet rule of Armenia, and other conflicts launched multiple waves of immigration to the United States. This serves as a reminder that even within a community that may seem similar from the outside, there can be many differences. Someone who migrated from communist Armenia may have a very different mindset than someone whose family has lived in the United States for a century. Interviewing elders in a community—in this lesson and at other points within ethnic studies—allows history to be told by those who both experienced marginalization (in their country of origin and in the United States) and acted as agents of change for their own life. Who tells history matters.

EXPLORING AND EMBRACING YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

To fully support the growth and learning of all of California's students, it is necessary for schools to engage their communities in the process of building and strengthening

connections across the ethnic groups they serve. An ethnic studies curriculum is just one component of this work. The entire educational program should promote this endeavor, even while the social studies bear particular responsibility for helping students develop a deep understanding of the community's history—within the context of state, national, and world histories—and the legacy of the past. Beyond classrooms, there is an opportunity for adult learning that engages whole faculties and the community at large. This wider engagement strengthens the community restoration noted in chapter 1.

Some of the ways students can be involved in exploring their own community include the following:

- **Oral History:** The best resources for learning about a community are often the people who live there. By bringing voices from the community into the classroom, teachers can help ensure that students' identities are affirmed and the community's stories are told.
- **Cultural Institutions:** Cultural organizations in your community play a key role in raising up the histories and contributions of the groups who live there. They also highlight those interactions between groups that have shaped the character of the community.
- **Memorials:** Memorials, monuments, and murals are key markers of a community's identity and history. They offer students opportunities to analyze critically whose voices are shared and whose history is acknowledged and to identify opportunities for giving voice to additional stories and histories within the community.

These lessons support educators in differentiating their instruction in order to reflect the diversity of Californians and the diversity of their own classrooms. When integrating these lessons, students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to recognize their role as agents of change.

COMPLICATING SINGLE STORIES

These lessons provide opportunities for students to reflect explicitly on unnoticed or unintended marginalization and the increase in stereotyping during times of heightened fear. As students become civic actors, they have an opportunity to challenge misperceptions which contribute to oppression. This begins with challenging our own misperceptions, as noted in author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's thought-provoking TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story." (See a related lesson at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link344>.)

Deborah Tannen, a professor, linguist, and author, notes, "We all know we are unique individuals, but we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It's a natural tendency,

since we must see the world in patterns in order to make sense of it; we wouldn't be able to deal with the daily onslaught of people and objects if we couldn't predict a lot about them and feel that we know who and what they are. But this natural and useful ability to see patterns of similarity has unfortunate consequences. It is offensive to reduce an individual to a category, and it is also misleading." This tendency toward patterns can lead to a single narrative about groups which are not our own. Ethnic studies provides a space to challenge that single narrative and fosters the space for all members of society to define their own identities rather than be defined by others.

For example, "Arab American" can refer to individuals with roots in 22 Arab countries. These countries are located across land stretching roughly from Northern Africa through Western Asia, which in itself suggests a far greater range of diversity than a single experience. Contrary to popular representation, not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs—or Arab Americans—are Muslim. Many Arab countries include Christian communities, and some have also had Jewish communities. Arabs have migrated to the United States for a variety of reasons, including economic need, educational opportunity, political conflict, and even war. Like many groups in the United States, the demographics of Arab Americans has shifted over time and continues to be fluid in nature. Also like many groups, the misperceptions about Arab Americans is often exacerbated by representation in the media which focuses on single stories. The lesson "Introduction to Arab American Studies" presents resources to guide students through discussions of the immigrant experiences of Arab Americans.

The lesson "Jewish Americans: Identity, Intersectionality, and Complicating Ideas of Race" provides another example for complicating single stories. Jewish Americans are connected through many ties, and yet each identity is a unique combination of facets. In this lesson, the single story is challenged by presenting experiences and perspectives from diverse voices who all identify with being Jewish American.

SHARING A WIDE PICTURE OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

These lessons include narratives that emphasize the contributions of diverse individuals in shaping US democratic life. It is important for students to see the widest range of individual backgrounds as well as forms of engagement to recognize the contributions already made to our democracy by different groups. Sometimes we look to the national stage for representation, but Californians can also look to local government and community leaders for examples of how individuals from many different backgrounds can and have already engaged in our democracy.

One example of this comes from the Sikh community. Sikhs have lived in California for over a century and have served as civic leaders at local, state, and national levels. The first

Sikh place of worship in the United States was established in Stockton, California, and California is now home to the largest Sikh population in the United States (approximately 250,000 with 74 Sikh houses of worship in 2020). The first-ever Asian and the first Indian to be elected to the United States Congress (serving from 1957 to 1963) was Dalip Singh Saund, who was Sikh. His civic leadership set an example and opened doors not just for the Sikh community, but for others as well. The lesson “The Sikh American Community in California” provides more detail.

WIDENING OUR UNIVERSE OF OBLIGATION

These lessons draw out another crucial opportunity for all students: to examine closely those moments in our history that cause increased fear in society and are often accompanied by heightened distrust of others, increased “othering” treatment, and even the violent targeting of individuals based on the identities they are perceived to hold. In many cases, these events exacerbate or make more visible historical divisions between groups. We have seen such behavior in times of war, following the September 11 terrorist attacks, and during the COVID pandemic. Such targeting leaves entire groups vulnerable, and in some cases has led to mass violence including ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Within high school classrooms, students should be expected to explore this level of exclusion and violent targeting at a number of points. There are historical periods to use in reference during ethnic studies as well, and will include:

- The Armenian Genocide during World War I
- The Holocaust during World War II
- The incarceration of Japanese Americans in California and across the nation during World War II
- The increased targeting of Muslims and others perceived to be different after the 9/11 terrorist attacks

The lesson “Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans” provides one example for looking into how long-lasting division and misperceptions become exacerbated in particular moments. Antisemitism is an ancient hatred that has persisted for centuries. It is also a contemporary hatred and form of prejudice, and reported incidents of antisemitism are increasing around the world and in California. Something that has been seen throughout history is that antisemitism has been fluid in shape—sometimes taking the form of religious targeting, at other times defined around ethnic or racial arguments. It has also been interwoven at times with white nationalism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

In conjunction with these lessons, teachers might consider introducing their students to the concept of “universe of obligation” to help them better understand and discuss how

societies define who is protected and who is not. Sociologist Helen Fein coined this term to describe the group of individuals within a society “toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.” In other words, a society’s universe of obligation includes those people that society believes deserve respect and whose rights it believes are worthy of protection.

A society’s universe of obligation can change. History has shown that in times of fear and uncertainty—such as war, economic depression, or pandemic—a society’s universe of obligation often narrows. Widely shared beliefs and attitudes about such social categories as religion, gender, and race also influence which people a society protects and which people it does not.

Although Fein conceived universe of obligation to describe the way nations determine membership, we might also refer to an individual’s universe of obligation to describe the circle of other individuals that a person feels a responsibility to care for and protect. Applying this concept to individuals gives us the opportunity to recognize the internalized hierarchies that influence how we think about and respond to the needs of others. While it is neither practical nor possible that one’s universe of obligation could include everyone equally, acknowledging the way we think about and prioritize our obligations toward others can help us act in a more thoughtful, compassionate manner.

The universe of obligation concept offers a powerful lens through which students can examine both their individual beliefs and actions and the systems and structures in our society that indicate who belongs and who does not, as well as how these thoughts change over time. The concept also lays the foundation for discussions about how students can use their own agency to help widen the circle of people who are included, respected, and protected in our society.

SEEKING MODELS OF INTERETHNIC BRIDGE BUILDING

As ethnic studies students explore social movements and equity, it is valuable to share examples of interethnic initiatives in which individuals from different groups have worked together for change. Depending on the history, interests, concerns, and demographics of your class and community, here are a few additional examples to add to those in the model curriculum:

- When the *Mendez v. Westminster* case challenged school segregation in California, amicus curiae briefs in support of Mendez were submitted by the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Lawyers Guild, the Japanese American Citizens League, the American Jewish Congress, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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- When his Japanese American friends were incarcerated during World War II, Mexican American high school student Ralph Lazo entered the camps with them.
 - Black Civil Rights leaders provided critical support for the Asian American Civil Rights Movement after the killing of Vincent Chin.
 - Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta are perhaps the best-known names associated with the United Farm Workers movement, but Larry Itliong and Naji Daifullah mobilized participation from Filipino and Arab American communities, respectively, which contributed to the impact for a common goal.
 - As the genocide in Darfur became visible globally, Armenians were one of the groups particularly vocal in advocating for action.
 - In 2017, as talk increased about a “Muslim ban,” many Japanese Americans mobilized to actively oppose it and increase education on civil rights.

Social movements present a complicated history, with spaces of more singular advocacy living side by side with collaboration. These examples are not intended to replace the presence and importance of civil rights movements dedicated to single groups. However, as we move forward as a diverse state, these examples can provide models for how to work together for change that benefits all. Such interethnic collaboration toward a shared purpose is, after all, crucial to strengthening democracy in the United States.

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