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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, California passed legislation (AB 101) mandating a semester of ethnic studies as a graduation requirement for public and charter high schools. Although students will not be obligated to take the courses until 2029, schools will be required to offer such courses as of 2025. Despite efforts by certain ideological activists to require schools to teach what is called “liberated ethnic studies,” the bill did not specify what kind of ethnic studies needed to be taught, leaving those decisions to local school boards.

The same ideological activists who lost their bid to impose liberated ethnic studies took their fight to the school boards. In February 2021, they formed the consulting firm Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium (LESMCC) in California to develop and promote liberated ethnic studies.

California allocated $50 million in its 2021-2022 budget to implement ethnic studies programs in high schools across the state and allotted $5 million to fund the County Office of Education to coordinate statewide ethnic studies professional development and an online resource hub. Tapping into the $50 million funding, LESMCC has already signed contracts with a number of California school districts to provide their liberated ethnic studies curriculum to students.

Much has been written about the problematic nature of liberated ethnic studies content and LESMCC’s prescriptive ideological approach. Until now, however, there have been exceedingly few in-depth investigations into the founders and thought leaders of LESMCC who continue to influence its current agenda and actions.

This report reveals how the promotion of liberated ethnic studies in California is part and parcel of a political and cultural agenda advanced by two radical organizations, Union del Barrio (UDB) and the Association of Raza Educators (ARE). They were the driving forces behind the failed efforts to impose liberated ethnic studies at the state level and are now among LESMCC’s primary backers. These two organizations are dominated by ideological perspectives that are hostile to American democratic ideals such as pluralism and individualism, all of which have been profoundly incorporated into LESMCC’s courses and teachings.

The overarching goal of the two organizations and now LESMCC is to foster a sense of estrangement and resentment to the West, particularly the United States, in line with their Marxist school of thought. If allowed to spread widely, this approach will likely lead to even greater polarization and racial divisions among Americans.

Considering the deep and extensive relationship UDB, ARE, and LESMCC have with the ethnic studies movement in California’s educational system – including synonymous ideologies and overlapping high-ranking staffers – a portion of the $55 million allocated by the California government is effectively being handed directly to UDB and ARE, arguably a severe misuse of taxpayer dollars.
CHAPTER 1:
General Background of Ethnic Studies in California and its Dangers

The Primary Forces Pushing Mandatory Ethnic Studies in California

1. **Union del Barrio (UDB)** is a revolutionary organization established in 1986 to “promote and defend the human rights and class interests” of Latin American and Chicano citizens living within the US borders.³ UDB is primarily based in California, with chapters in Los Angeles and San Diego. The organization seeks the liberation of “la Raza” (indigenous and Latino inhabitants of North and South America) from the “international capitalist elite that is currently led by the United States.”⁴

2. **Association of Raza Educators (ARE)** was established in 1994 by members of UDB and brings together public-school educators, university professors, and students committed to the “democratization of public education” and the eradication of alleged biases towards minorities, specific ethnicities, and racial groups in the teaching curriculum.⁵

The two organizations share a radical Marxist ideology that rejects the United States. Marxism is a philosophy arguing that a “workers’ revolution” will overthrow the established social, political, and economic order in the West and usher in an era of communism, in which social classes would no longer exist, and all property and wealth would be communally owned.

UDB appears to reject the United States’ political, cultural, and educational system, which it describes as a system “designed to exploit our labor, keep a disproportionate number of our people in prisons, stereotype us through the media, falsify our history, deny us a relevant/productive education, and militarize the border in order to keep out the very same people from which Aztlan/México Ocupado was stolen.”⁶

In a 2018 website post, UDB boasted that it has “struggled for over 35 years for the self-determination and liberation of the Mexican people within the political borders of the United States – what we consider occupied Mexico.”⁷

Similarly, ARE tackles the issue of American oppression from the educational perspective, alleging that public schools are directed by “racist administrators,” pupils are taught a “racist curriculum,” and teachers do not possess enough political awareness.⁸
What Does Union del Barrio Stand for?

Facebook, published 06/19/21

Facebook, published 01/02/22

Facebook, published 06/12/20

Facebook, published 01/23/2019
CHAPTER 1: General Background of Ethnic Studies in California and its Dangers

In the framework of this radical ideology, ARE sees education as a “tool for liberation” from “Western capitalist oppression” and ethnic studies as the pivotal educational vehicle for raising awareness about these issues in underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. As such, ARE crafted an ethnic studies program revolving around such principles as “indigeneity/roots, colonization/dehumanization, hegemony, and regeneration, transformation/social justice.” On its homepage, ARE boasts that it has “launched several successful campaigns that include... winning Ethnic Studies requirements in multiple school districts.”


In 2013, UDB campaigned to support teacher Jose Lara’s bid for Governing Board member of El Rancho Unified School District (ERUSD). Once elected, Lara worked to insert ethnic studies into the ERUSD teaching curriculum. His efforts culminated in June 2014, when ERUSD became the first school district in the history of California to make ethnic studies a requirement to graduate from high school. In September 2014, with UDB’s help, Lara established and became the Coordinator of the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition (ESNC), which sought to promote ethnic studies to all students in California and beyond.

The chosen Coordinator of Statewide Curricular Advocacy for the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition was R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, a scholar who denounced the United States as a “Eurocentric, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, hetero-patriarchal, and anthropocentric paradigm brought from Europe.”

Ron Gochez, who heads the Los Angeles chapter of UDB, taught with Jose Lara at Santee High School in Los Angeles. He refers to police officers as “pigs” and the US military as a “terrorist organization.” During a rally at UCLA in February 2011, Gochez made an incendiary video in which he referred to Americans as “frail, racist, white people” and to California as “stolen, occupied Mexico.”

At the beginning of 2014, ESNC launched an intensive campaign to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). A local UDB representative, Patricia Marin, played a crucial role in lobbying for the cause, and in November 2014, LAUSD officially introduced ethnic studies classes in all its schools. UDB publicly took credit for the victory.
In February 2016, ESNC established the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition Compton (ESNCC) to fight for the creation of an ethnic studies course as a high school graduation requirement in all the high schools in the Compton Unified School District (CUSD). UDB supported the initiative from the outset, and UDB Los Angeles Coordinator Ron Gochez solicited donations for ESNC. The campaign culminated in December 2017 when CUSD approved a resolution to implement ethnic studies as a graduation requirement. UDB publicly took the credit for the victory.

In April 2016, Salinas district assemblyman Luis A. Alejo introduced AB 2016, which instructed the California Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to develop — and California’s State Board of Education to adopt — a model curriculum in ethnic studies. R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, former ESNC Curricular Coordinator, was designated as co-chair of the AB 2016 ethnic studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee. Additionally, ESNC and UDB intensively campaigned in favor of the bill, which Governor Jerry Brown approved in September 2016.

In compliance with the requirements of AB 2016, Jose Lara was elected as a member of the IQC in November 2017 to work directly on the selection of members for the Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (MCAC), which would develop the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). The Committee was established in January 2019 and was composed of 18 members.
CHAPTER 1: General Background of Ethnic Studies in California and its Dangers

On January 31, 2019, assemblyman Jose Medina submitted AB 331, which mandated the completion of a one-semester course in ethnic studies for high school students graduating in the 2029-2030 school year. In parallel, MCAC met three times between February and March 2019 and produced the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. The California Department of Education (CDE) concluded that the curriculum did not meet the criteria of being “accurate, free of bias, appropriate for all learners” and demanded modifications.

In response, three grassroots student organizations – Generation Up (GenUp), Diversify our Narrative, and March for Our Lives California – launched a petition in September 2019 titled “Save California Ethnic Studies” that sought to move AB 331 to a vote in the state senate. The petition received over 25K signatures and was officially endorsed by Union del Barrio (UDB), which partnered with Jose Medina during a public event to promote the issue.

In April 2019, San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD)’s board unanimously passed a resolution making ethnic studies a graduation requirement beginning in the 2021-2022 school year. The resolution was introduced and supported by SDUSD board member Richard Barrera, who also serves as a leader in ARE.

Public Controversy Over Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

In April 2020, a group of 50 ethnic studies educators and scholars from across California informally convened to discuss the prospect of creating and implementing a “Liberated Ethnic Studies Curriculum.” In their view, CDE assigned the task of revision to “rightwing demagogues and lobbyists” who “sanitized” the original ESMC draft “by removing or redefining such terms as capitalism and revolution,” “erasing all mention of Palestine” and minimizing the “impact BLM has had on all communities of color.” At the time, ARE supported the group and hosted a virtual symposium on the issue of ESMC with two leaders of the initiatives: Guadalupe Carrasco Cardona and Theresa Montano.

Criticism of the CDE’s proposed modifications to the ESMC draft also came from Arab Americans, who alleged that the CDE wanted the omission of all references to the Arab community because it considered “Palestine, Palestinians, and Palestinian Americans as topics not worthy of high school study.”

The CDE and others were concerned, however, not with the representation of Palestinian Americans as a distinct ethnic community, but that the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) and other members of the Save Arab American Studies coalition were presenting a one-sided narrative regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Notably, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict was the only current international conflict referenced in the ESMC curriculum.

To ensure the inclusion of Arab-American history and culture in the new ESMC draft, the “Save Arab American Studies” coalition was established in September 2020.
CHAPTER 1: General Background of Ethnic Studies in California and its Dangers

The Establishment of the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMCC)

On September 30, 2020, California’s governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Medina’s AB 331, demanding that the ESMC undergo further changes because it was still “insufficiently balanced and inclusive.”

On February 5, 2021, Guadalupe Carrasco Cardona, an MCAC member and UDB and ARE comrade, established the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium (LESMCC). LESMCC was founded as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located at 1130 Hazard Avenue, Los Angeles, the same as Cardona’s official address.

Together with Cardona, at least two other MCAC members are architects of the LESMCC. These individuals are ARE Board Member Theresa Montano, and Samia Shoman. Among other services, LESMCC provides custom educator training, two-day instruction sessions for school personnel, and course design. LESMCC also offers “community couch time,” a YouTube ethnic studies program to facilitate the teacher’s access to ethnic studies as presented by LESMCC.

Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium’s (LESMCC) 501(c)(3) formation documents (LESMCC) (RCT, Registry Verification Search accessed 09/22)
CHAPTER 1: General Background of Ethnic Studies in California and its Dangers

From an ideological point of view, LESMCC retained the overall approach and controversial material found in the original ESMC and its politicized orientation, according to which ethnic studies’ objective is to “connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on global and local levels to ensure a truer democracy.” In this context, “truer democracy” is a Marxist concept denoting the elimination of private property.

The LESMCC, in fact, focuses solely on radical resistance movements, ignoring the numerous peaceful social movements that have led to social progress.

The LESMCC and the Save Arab American Studies Coalition worked together to oppose the passing of the revised ESMC. On March 12, 2021, the founding members of LESMCC addressed a letter to the CDE to further complain about the alleged influence of “privileged white voices” on the revised ESMC. By “privileged white voices,” the LESMCC was referring to those pushing for a non-ideological version of ethnic studies. That same day, a coalition of grassroots organizations addressed a letter to CSBE requesting that it not pass ESMC, deeming that it “is simply not an Ethnic Studies curriculum.”

Overlapping Personnel among LESMCC with UDB & ARE

The following list highlights individuals who work for or are affiliated with LESMCC and either UDB or ARE. This list (which is not exhaustive) further demonstrates the deep connection between LESMCC with both entities.

- Guadalupe (Lupe) Carrasco Cardona is the chair of ARE’s Los Angeles chapter, a member of UDB, and a co-founder of LESMCC, as well as the latter’s chief executive officer and chief financial officer.
- Kelly Flores is a member of UDB, Secretary of ARE’s Los Angeles chapter, member of ARE’s California Statewide Concilio, and a LESMCC member.
- Theresa Montano is a Board Member of ARE, as well as a LESMCC Lead, one of its co-founders, and secretary.
- Ndindi Kitonga is a “praxis co-chair” at ARE’s Los Angeles chapter and co-Lead of LESMCC’s Black Studies chapter.
- Guillermo Gomez is a member of ARE and co-Lead of the Chicana/Latin curriculum at LESMCC.
- Sean Arce is a member of ARE and LESMCC.
- Eunice Ho is a member of ARE, a LESMCC instructor, and the official LESMCC graphic designer.

The financial implications of this overlap may well represent a conflict of interest. Many of the same people lobbying for ethnic studies to be implemented in California schools would also profit by developing and teaching LESMCC’s curriculum.
Hostility Towards America and American Democratic Ideals

R. Tolteka Cuauhtin is one of LESMCC’s founders who, as mentioned prior, denounced the United States as a “Eurocentric, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, hetero-patriarchal, and anthropocentric paradigm brought from Europe.”

LESMCC incorporates Critical Race Theory (CRT) into its curriculum.

Broadly speaking, CRT is a cross-disciplinary examination of how various aspects of society are shaped by social perceptions of race and ethnicity, consciously and unconsciously.

The Associated Press writes that CRT “centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation’s institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people in society.”

Richard Delgado, one of CRT’s founders, distances ethnic studies from the fundamental concepts that undergird western civilization, explaining that the theory questions “the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.”

Opponents argue that “Critical/Liberated Ethnic Studies is harmful because it makes CRT the sole ideological framework of the curriculum [in K-12 classes].” A veteran teacher of 15 years from California, upon discovering that CRT was being taught in her school, made the painful decision to quit and wrote, “Public schools are trying to divide the next generation of Americans based on race. There’s a word for that—racism.”

Excerpt from Tolteka’s book “Rethinking Ethnic Studies.” Source: Chris Rufo Twitter, accessed 10/09/2022
According to LESMCC’s website, “Critical Race Theory is one of the many theoretical lenses used in Ethnic Studies.”

The curriculum integrates CRT’s idea that the US is oppressive and racist into its teaching. It explicitly states that “Racism is endemic in the United States” and that minorities suffer from “pervasive” “systems of oppression” on institutional, ideological, internalized, and interpersonal levels. It also states that there is “evidence of continued systematic and institutional racism” in American society.

LESMCC positions itself and ethnic studies as antithetical to Western thought. For example, the curriculum declares that ethnic studies are “an explicit counter narrative to traditional western disciplines” and “strongly diverges from the western educational approach.”

LESMCC also embeds Marxist philosophy and thinking into its curriculum in line with its CRT-driven approach. (CRT has been accused of being deeply linked to Marxism.) The syllabus contains references to the YouTube Channel “Marxism simplifies” and promotes the work of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci.

LESMCC also glorifies militant Marxist “role models,” including Oscar Lopez Rivera, the leader of a paramilitary Marxist organization responsible for over 130 bombings in US cities, who received a 55-year prison sentence for his crimes. Chapter four of LESMCC’s “Asian America, Pacific Islanders, Arab American Studies” includes teaching material based on the story and experience of Maoist activist Yuri Kochiyama, who stated in a 2003 interview that “I consider Osama bin Laden as one of the people that I admire. To me, he is in the category of Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Patrice Lumumba, Fidel Castro, all leaders that I admire.” Another radical lionized by LESMCC’s curriculum is George Jackson, who was arrested for armed robbery in 1961, charged with the death of a correctional officer in 1970, and killed during a botched prison escape in 1971. Leroy Eldridge Cleaver, an early leader of the Marxist Black Panther Party who was convicted of burglary, assault, rape, and attempted murder, is also glorified in the LESMCC curriculum.
## LEMS MCC’s Infiltration into the California School System

In light of the above, it is worth examining how LEMS MCC has successfully infiltrated California’s school systems at the state and local levels. In large part, this can be attributed to the strong roots that LEMS MCC maintains in the state’s education systems.

Indeed, LEMS MCC members are also members of influential education organizations (such as the California Teachers Association and National Education Association) or work at local school districts. Below is a brief rundown of some of these individuals and their affiliations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEMS MCC Faculty</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Guadalupe Carrasco Cardona | • Los Angeles Unified School District (ELD Coordinator at Edward R. Roybal Learning Center)  
 • California Teachers Association (member)  
 • Stanford Instructional Leadership Corps (member) |
| Theresa Montano | • California Teachers Association (vice-president)  
 • Los Angeles Unified School District (Member of the Union of Ethnic Studies Workgroup) |
| R. Tolteka Cuauhtin | • California Teachers Association (member)  
 • Stanford Instructional Leadership Corps (member) |
| Tricia Gallagher-Geursten | • San Diego Unified School District (Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, Chair)  
 • CA National Association for Multicultural Education (Co-President) |
| Mary Levy | • Upland Teachers Association (member) |
| Tracie Noriega | • San Lorenzo Unified School District (Assistant Superintendent) |
| Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales | • San Francisco Unified School District (Ethnic Studies Curriculum Consultant) |
| Jo Dana Campbell | • Hayward Unified School District (Intervention Specialist) |
| Samia Shoman | • San Mateo Union High School District (Manager of English Learner and Compliance Program) |
| Tanuya Jaco | • California Teachers Association (Director for District G - Santa Clara, and San Jose)  
 • National Education Association (member of the Board of Directors) |
CHAPTER 3:
Financial Support of Ethnic Studies in California

Section 132 of the Education Omnibus Trailer Bill (AB 130) for 2021–22 appropriated $50 million of taxpayer funds for allocation to school districts, county offices of education, charter schools, and state special schools serving pupils in grades nine to twelve to fund the implementation of ethnic studies course offerings. (On a per-pupil basis, for a total amount of $25.57.)

AB 130 specifies that the purpose of such allocations is to “support curriculum and instructional resources, professional development, or other activities that support the creation or expansion of ethnic studies course offerings, including, but not limited to, courses that use the state adopted ethnic studies model curriculum as a guide.”

A full breakdown of the schools and the amount they were apportioned in the context of AB 130 can be found on the California Department of Education website. Below is a screenshot of the schools that received the highest amounts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/District</th>
<th>2011-22 Final Allocation ($25.57 Per-Student)</th>
<th>Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Unified</td>
<td>119322</td>
<td>$3,050,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern High</td>
<td>42451</td>
<td>$1,085,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Unified</td>
<td>28930</td>
<td>$739,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetwater Union High</td>
<td>27163</td>
<td>$694,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaffey Joint Union High</td>
<td>23566</td>
<td>$602,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Beach Unified</td>
<td>22660</td>
<td>$579,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Side Union High</td>
<td>21844</td>
<td>$558,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antelope Valley Union High</td>
<td>21697</td>
<td>$554,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk Grove Unified</td>
<td>20801</td>
<td>$531,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno Unified</td>
<td>19663</td>
<td>$502,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaheim Union High</td>
<td>19553</td>
<td>$499,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corona-Norco Unified</td>
<td>17496</td>
<td>$447,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxnard Union High</td>
<td>17394</td>
<td>$444,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grossmont Union High</td>
<td>17105</td>
<td>$437,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Unified</td>
<td>15697</td>
<td>$401,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capistrano Unified</td>
<td>15538</td>
<td>$397,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesto City High</td>
<td>15428</td>
<td>$394,439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: Financial Support of Ethnic Studies in California

Under California’s law mandating ethnic studies, several school districts have signed agreements with LESMCC to provide such services.

The organization has signed four contracts thus far as of September 2022:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Contract Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castro Valley School District(^{87})</td>
<td>$82,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa Valley Unified School District (contract since canceled)(^{88})</td>
<td>$38,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson Elementary School</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayward Unified School District(^{89})</td>
<td>$35,395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, in April 2021, the Salinas Union High School District hired “Our Transformation of Education,” a consulting firm directed by LESMCC member R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, to assist in developing an ethnic studies program. The service’s overall cost is $13,500, at a rate of $1,500 per hour.\(^{90}\)

Moreover, California allotted $5 million to fund the County Office of Education to coordinate statewide ethnic studies professional development and an online resource hub. CDE awarded this grant to the San Diego County Office of Education in the Spring of 2022.\(^{91}\) The person leading the project is Talisa Sullivan.\(^{92}\) Sullivan organized two summer institutes for teachers for the Riverside County Office of Education, which featured LESMCC speakers and its lesson plans.\(^{93}\) Based on the San Diego effort so far, there is reason to believe that the LESMCC model will be adopted in such efforts.
CONCLUSION

This report detailed the development and implementation of ethnic studies into California’s educational system. Since 2021, $55 million has been allocated for ethnic studies programs in high schools across the state from funds from the California state government.

Open-source research found that the effort to integrate ethnic studies into the California system was effectively spearheaded by Union del Barrio (UDB) and the Association of Raza Educators (ARE), two radical organizations that are now among the primary backers of the highly controversial Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium (LESMCC). The report demonstrated how UDB and ARE aim to further extreme ideological agendas, which have been thoroughly integrated into critical ethnic studies and LESMCC. These agendas can damage the United States internally by instilling hostile and inaccurate views of American democracy into school kids, erroneously portraying the American democratic system as fundamentally racist, violent, and oppressive.

Considering these findings, the state of California should pause the implementation of ethnic studies and develop policies and procedures that ensure that education providers meet the state’s standards of fairness, critical thinking, and educational rigor.
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