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**Boycotting the Zionist:
Disputing the *California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum* (2019)**

by

Zavi Feldstein

**Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment
of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts**

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We may talk of occupying neutral ground, but on this subject, in its present attitude, there is no such thing as neutral ground. He that is not for us is against us, and he that gathereth not with us, scattereth abroad. If you are on what you suppose to be neutral ground, the South look upon you as on the side of the oppressor.

Angelina Grimke Weld, *Pro-Abolition Speech at Pennsylvania Hall*, May 17, 1838

Preface

Growing up, my father, a rabbi, told me every day, “Challenge what you know, that is the most Jewish thing you can do.” He refrained, “Ask good questions; challenge authority.” He taught me that to question and challenge is the foundation of Jewish thought, with roots as far back as *Talmud* and even farther back as *Torah*—Abraham himself challenges God. I grew up for fifteen years in Jewish day school, and I challenged my teachers every day (to the point I was removed from my high school’s Hebrew program). When I began researching this thesis, I assumed my task was to question the ideologies imbued on me by the ‘mainstream’ American Jewish institutions of my childhood, to use their philosophy of intellect to reflect the mirror back on them in a quintessentially, extremely painful, Jewish way.

I went to college two thousand miles away from home because I suspected certain knowledge had been absent from my Jewish day school education. When I left for college, I did not know the content of those gaps, nor how vital they would be to fill. Then, college taught me a critique of Zionism that fundamentally altered my identity; it challenged every notion of Judaism I’d been presented through my early education and brought me a pain nearly unresolvable. I grew resentful, hateful; I felt deceived. When I first began writing this thesis, that resentment led me to believe Jewish history, at least, Ashkenazi¹ Jewish history, warranted no place in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). Then, I reached a point where the research dead-ended, and I couldn’t discern why.

¹ European.

It has been said that personal narratives deserve no place in academic work; this assumption, I challenge, too. I cannot possibly present this thesis without explaining the context for my positionality. It is inherently my need to negotiate the inconsistencies between my early education in Jewish day school and my later education as an American Studies, liberal arts student that provide the grounds for this project. The issue of my thesis, at its core, is one of narrative construction; and I have been taught two very conflicting narratives.

I originally presumed my father's epithet—to ask good questions—meant I should challenge the Jewish community in which I grew up for most of my life. So I focused on challenging this community, but I failed to project the same level of criticism onto the arguments from proponents of the ESMC. I realized: If non-Jewish scholars read my thesis and came out as resentful as I towards the American Jewish establishment, what affecting work was I really accomplishing? Furthermore, if I accepted the framework presented by Ethnic Studies without truly considering the merits of Jewish communal arguments for inclusion, how would that project really benefit, either?

For a large part of my research process, I assumed the most sensible avenue for Jewish inclusion of any kind in the ESMC would be through discussions of Jews of color, who are marginalized by establishment American Judaism. Yet the inclusion of Jews of color on the basis of exclusion from dominant American Jewishness, without an equal discussion of the merits of Jewish inclusion overall, meant accepting the arguments presented by the Ethnic Studies community without actually challenging any assumptions. Equally, I would have followed the Ethnic Studies community in condemning the Jewish critiques without adequately weighing the validity of the Jewish community arguments. Both failures would enable the trope of White

American Jews as non-oppressed, fully privileged and willingly assimilated into dominant European Whiteness without offering any of the appropriate context with which to critically engage this declaration.

Through my research, it became clear that at various points in Jewish history there have always been Jewish scholars who assimilated into the secular expectations of academia. While they did so with the intent of reducing antisemitism, time and again their words were turned back on to their communities and morphed into substantiations for the perpetuation of anti-Jewish bigotry. I could not accept the status of a scholar who exerted so much effort condemning the Jewish community that my words later functioned as evidence for further Jewish exclusion. As much as I intended to spend this thesis challenging the American Jewish establishment, I realized that challenging this establishment did not necessarily warrant condemning it.

To be clear, my intent for this project was never to argue for or against Jewish inclusion in the ESMC, and I have not made any arguments regarding whether or not Jews should be included. It is not my scholarly place to assert a solution to this dispute. I include this personal reflection to highlight how my positionality is central to the research questions; that just as I realized I could not write a thesis without challenging the Ethnic Studies community, so too did I come to understand that should my biases prevent me from discussing the Jewish community with sympathy, my project held little merit anyway.

Both Jewish Studies scholars and Ethnic Studies scholars root their academic ethos in skepticism; I have tried my best to do the same, as equally a skeptic as an advocate.

INTRODUCTION

I embarked on this thesis with the aim of exploring the dispute over Jewish exclusion from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). The ESMC is a 350-page guide for California schools to implement a counter-narrative that re-centers people of color histories in the public school curriculum. I truly believed this could be done through analyzing the history of Ethnic Studies and outlining the ways in which Jewish history, especially Ashkenazi Jewish history, fails to fit within the stated pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Ashkenazi, a term referenced throughout this thesis, refers to Jewish communities from Eastern and Western Europe who in the United States are privy to European Whiteness and dominate the American Jewish establishment. This term refers historically to the Jewish diaspora communities of Germany and Northern France,² dating at least to the Middle Ages, who migrated to the Rhine region following exile from biblical Israel.³ My aim in this thesis, as previously stated, is to explore a dispute; I cannot possibly critically analyze a dispute without first presenting with comprehensiveness the contextually of each side's claims. Otherwise, am I really allowing readers to think critically? Am I really critically thinking myself? Truly exploring this dispute requires utilizing an analytical framework of authentic comparison between two opposing, equally impassioned—yes, unequally represented—interpretations.

The need for an emancipatory and culturally relevant pedagogy for students of color cannot be denied, nor can the unequal battle their communities must fight to achieve such

² The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ashkenazi: People." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Nov. 27, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ashkenazi>.

³ Fleeing the Crusades in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, this community expanded eastward into Slavic lands, such as Poland, Lithuania and Russia; fleeing the Programs as early as the seventeenth century, large cohorts of this community moved westward, to Great Britain, Austria, and so forth.

curricular reforms. I believed as an Ashkenazi Jew, a White Jew, that any critique I might present in opposition to the draft ESMC would inevitably mean de-centering people of color, re-centering colonization, and writing in direct antithesis to the meaning of Ethnic Studies; negating the validity of the oppressive histories of peoples of color in the project of Whiteness to insert my own bias into the debate. But Jewish Whiteness is a particularly convoluted concept, and accepting the arguments presented by representatives of the Ethnic Studies community without also contextualizing and dissecting the ethnic assignment of “White Jew” overall fails to discover the *actual* underlying dispute. The needs and successes of Ethnic Studies programs have been validated by education research; K-12 students in Ethnic Studies courses attend more school days, perform better academically,⁴ and express increased wellbeing.⁵ The dispute over the ESMC, however, is not merely about the belongingness of Jewish students in the discipline of Ethnic Studies. More so, the dispute concerns variant conceptions of entho-racial identity trapped in the rhetoric of comparison, better prepared to antagonize than to hear.

The Concept: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)

Passed in September 2016, California State Assembly Bill 2016, Chapter 327, legislated for the California Department of Education to organize for the creation of an Ethnic Studies curriculum for the state’s public high schools. Once the legislation passed in the state legislature, the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Department of Education began oversight of the inception of a model curriculum from which schools could reference when implementing

⁴ Nolan Cabrera, Jeffrey Milem, and Ronald Marx, “An empirical analysis of the effects of Mexican American Studies participation on student achievement within Tucson Unified School District,” *Report for Special Master for the Tucson Unified School District Desegregation Case* (2012), retrieved from https://www.coe.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/MAS_report_2012_0.pdf.

⁵ Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales et al., “Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K-12 Schools from the Research,” *The Urban Review* 47, no. 1 (March 12, 2015).

their own, site-specific Ethnic Studies programming. In January 2019, the Department of Education recruited eighteen members to serve on an Advisory Committee tasked with writing the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC).⁶ The Board of Education then posted guidelines for the curriculum publicly on their website and documented a deadline for implementation of the ESMC by March 31, 2020.

Ethnic Studies is both a pedagogy and a situated academic discipline; its particular history is rooted most concretely at San Francisco State College during the high point of 1960s student activism. Ethnic Studies pedagogy stresses the empowerment of students of color, by people of color, through the deconstruction of institutional, internalized, ideological and interpersonal systems of oppression.⁷ The California ESMC bill does not itself mandate the teaching of Ethnic Studies; the drafters explain in the introduction of the ESMC that the lesson plans offered are meant to function as either stand-alone courses or inspiration from which to integrate Ethnic Studies content into existing course structures.

In the summer of 2019, the Advisory Committee published its draft California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) on the Department of Education's website and released it for public feedback. The ESMC is 350-pages long; the first and last twenty pages include an introduction and glossary, respectively.⁸ The middle three-hundred pages or so offer a myriad of lesson plans structured within seven separate course areas: (1) Introduction to Ethnic Studies, (2)

⁶ The committee consists of the following California educators: five university faculty (of Ethnic Studies, Chicana Studies, African American Studies, and/or Asian American Studies); six high school teachers (from school districts including Alameda Unified, San Mateo Union, and Santa Ana Unified, among others); six teachers listed only by their school districts (including San Francisco Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Coachella Valley Unified, Elk Grove Unified, and Jurupa Unified); and one teacher listed from a charter school.

⁷ "California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum," *Model Curriculum Advisory Committee to the State Board of Education Instructional Quality Commission*, June 2019.

⁸ California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum," *Model Curriculum Advisory Committee to the State Board of Education Instructional Quality Commission*, June 2019.

African American Studies, (3) Asian American Studies, (4) Native American Studies, (5) Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies, (6) Pacific Islander Studies and (7) Arab American Studies.⁹ Most of the course outlines begin by defining the history and/or framework of the identity-group centered in that section, with an explanation of the related pedagogical traditions of the given field.¹⁰ Immediately following the ESMC's publication for public feedback, the draft received conflicting responses from constituents across the state, with particularly vocal opposition from members of the California Jewish community, who had been excluded from any meaningful consideration in the curriculum.

Three Letters and a Dispute

(1) California Legislative Jewish Caucus

On July 29, 2019, the California Legislative Jewish Caucus (hence called: the Jewish Caucus)¹¹ published a letter criticizing the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) for, what they termed, a “purposeful exclusion” of Jewish history and a “political bias” perceptible through the ESMC's uncritical support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement—a boycott of the State of Israel—in addition to a simultaneous omission of any meaningful inclusion of Jewish history. The BDS movement imposes a cultural, economic and academic boycott of the State of Israel, as well as imploring that international governments sanction the Israeli government in opposition to its military regime and local community organizations and

⁹ “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The Jewish Caucus states the following mission(s) on its website: “(1) Be a Jewish voice for justice, equality, and progress; (2) Promote the educational, social, legislative, professional and cultural interests of its members; (3) Serve as a resource to, and advocate on behalf of, the professional, educational, social, political and cultural concerns of the Jewish Community; (4) Develop and advance programs and policies that further the interests of the Jewish Caucus.” California Legislative Jewish Caucus, “Our Mission.” *Jewish Caucus*. Accessed Jan. 29, 2020. <https://jewishcaucus.legislature.ca.gov/about>.

centers of commerce (churches, banks, etc.) divest economically from Israeli companies and the State of Israel itself.

The Jewish Caucus letter accentuates a priority for diversity, applauding the movement for an Ethnic Studies curriculum but withdrawing support until Jewish history is written into the curriculum, which should include a definition of the term “antisemitism” and a more comprehensive analysis of BDS. All sixteen members of the Jewish Caucus signed in support of the letter, a cohort that notably includes at least three non-Jewish and/or non-Ashkenazi representatives.¹² The Jewish Caucus writes in the letter,

As elected representatives and members of California’s diverse Jewish community, we have consistently prioritized efforts to promote inclusion and have strongly supported efforts to ensure that California students understand our state’s complicated history and rich diversity. However, we cannot support a curriculum that erases the American Jewish experience, fails to discuss antisemitism, reinforces negative stereotypes about Jews, singles out Israel for criticism, and would institutionalize the teaching of antisemitic stereotypes in our public schools.¹³

The Jewish Caucus critiques the 350-page draft for, what they term, an “intentional” and “purposeful” rejection of the American Jewish community and the American Jewish experience.

The overall critiques the Jewish Caucus presents are similar and common in American Jewish establishment discourse. The Caucus delineates four categories of concern: the ESMC (1) “Effectively Erases the American Jewish Experiences,” (2) “Omits Antisemitism,” (3) “Denigrates Jews,” and (4) “Singles out Israel for Condemnation.” They argue that the ESMC fails to mention (or define) “antisemitism” at any point throughout the document, and, further,

¹² Members of the CA Jewish Legislative Caucus who signed the letter: Ben Allen (Chair), Jesse Gabriel (Vice-Chair), Richard Bloom (50th District), Laura Friedman (43rd District), Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (16th District), Marc Berman (24th District), Marc Levine (10th District), Jose Medina (61st District), Adrin Nazarian (46th District), Blanca E. Rubio (48th District), Steven M. Glazer (7th District), Robert M. Hertzberg (18th District), Hannah-Beth Jackson (19th District), Susan Rubio (22nd District), Henry Stern (27th District), Scott Wiener (11th District).

¹³ California Legislative Jewish Caucus, “Letter to the Instructional Quality Commission,” *State of California Legislature*, July 29, 2019.

acknowledges Jewish people only rarely and predominantly through denigrating characterizations.¹⁴ On the level of impact, the Jewish Caucus fears that excluding American Jewish experiences from the ESMC is “harmful to Jewish and non-Jewish students” and, further, places Jewish students at a particularly high risk of facing increased classroom hate, prejudice, bullying and seclusion. They write, “It would be a cruel irony if a curriculum meant to help alleviate prejudice and bigotry were to instead marginalize Jewish students and fuel hatred and discrimination against the Jewish community.”¹⁵

(2) Mizrahi and Sephardi Community Organizations in California

On August 4th, 2019, a separate Jewish community group in California, one less often represented in dominant discourses on American Jewishness, wrote a letter responding to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC).¹⁶ Spearheaded by the group Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA),¹⁷ a San Francisco-based non-profit established to “educat[e] and advocat[e] on behalf of Jewish refugees and Mizrahi Jews from Arab countries,” the letter included signatures from ten other Mizrahi and Sephardi organizations and religious

¹⁴ They cite a particular lyric quoted in the ESMC. In a lesson plan titled, “Hip Hop as Resistance,” the lyrics of “Somos Sur,” a Spanish and Arabic song by Ana Tijoux, with an Arabic verse rapped by Shadia Mansour, who is Palestinian, are included for a discussion about protest music. The verse reads: “For every free political prisoner, an Israeli colony is expanded. For each greeting, a thousand houses were demolished. They [Israeli Jews] use the press so they can manufacture” (ESMC, p. 269).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, “Sephardic and Mizrahi Communal Response to the Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum of California’s Department of Education,” Aug. 4, 2019, <https://www.jimena.org/sephardic-and-mizrahi-communal-response-to-the-proposed-ethnic-studies-model-curriculum-of-californias-department-of-education/>

¹⁷ JIMENA was founded in 2002, according to their website, “as the only organization in North America exclusively focused on educating and advocating on behalf of Jewish refugees and Mizrahi Jews from Arab countries.” They remain “a thought-leader and resource center for multiple institutions advancing the history, heritage and culture of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews.” <https://www.jimena.org/about-jimena/>.

congregations.¹⁸ Who are Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews? Before the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, best estimates number that more than one million Jews lived in Muslim- and/or Arab-ruled countries. As described in the letter,

*Mizrahi Jews are an indigenous group from the Middle East, whose ancestors lived continuously in the region for over 2,500 years. Sephardic Jewish communities from Spain integrated into North African and Middle Eastern Jewish communities as a result of the Spanish Inquisition [1492] and today there is much overlap between Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews. In the mid to late 20th century, state-sanctioned antisemitism, frequently taken under the banner of anti-Zionism, led to the ethnic cleansing and displacement of close to one million Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews from countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa. 650,000 of these Jews fled to Israel as stateless refugees and the remainder scattered to countries around the world, including the USA. Today, Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews comprise over half of Israel's Jewish population [...] Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews are a racially diverse ethnic sub-group that is both proudly Jewish and proudly Middle Eastern.*¹⁹

The term “Sephardi” is often mistakenly employed to lump two historically distinct Jewish communities together, Sephardim and Mizrahim. The two originally developed in very different regions, with particular traditions, religious interpretations and cultures. The word “Sephardi” comes from the Hebrew, “*Sefarad*,” literally meaning “Spain.” Sephardi Jews lived in the Iberian Peninsula as early as the Roman period, in Spain and Portugal, until the mass expulsion from the region in the fifteenth century.²⁰ Following “over a century of physical violence, forced baptisms, and disputations,” in 1492, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon issued the Edict of Expulsion forcing all Jews residing under Spanish rule with an

¹⁸ Organizations: 30 Years After, Baba Sale Congregation, Bar Yohai Sephardic Minyan, Congregation Magen David, Iranian American Jewish Federation, JIMENA, Kahal Joseph Congregation, The Karaite Jews of America, Magain David Sephardim Congregation, Sephardic Education Center, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Sephardi: People.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Nov. 27, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sephardi>.

ultimatum to either convert or flee.²¹ Refugees of the Spanish Inquisition became the newest part of “multiple Sephardi diasporas,” fleeing to Ottoman-controlled lands, the Middle East and North Africa, where many integrated into the indigenous Jewish communities, Arab Jews, or *Mizrachim*.²² Though Mizrahi and Sephardi Jewries developed in geographical isolation from each other for much of history, their interactions beginning in this period resulted in the modern overlap of customs and traditions observable between the two.

JIMENA and the ten undersigned Mizrahi and Sephardi community groups argue that the ESMC fails to acknowledge this history by omitting any definition or clarification when the curriculum describes “Arab.” This, they write, “leav[es] educators and readers to easily conflate [...] ‘Arabs,’ ‘Muslims,’ and ‘Middle Easterners,’” which excludes all non-Muslim Arab groups from consideration. They voice concerns specifically with the Arab American Studies course, because by erasing Jewish and other minority perspectives from the Middle East, they contend that the ESMC “perpetuates a legacy of oppression and cultural genocide of non-Muslim Middle Eastern groups who fled persecution to find sanctuary in the United States”²³ and promotes “only [...] the experience of the dominant ethnic-religious group from the Middle East.” Which, they contend, is antithetical to Ethnic Studies—a pedagogy of counter-narrative and empowerment.

(3) Monteiro on Behalf of the Council of Ethnic Studies

Kenneth Monteiro, former Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University and Acting Director of the César Chávez Institute, responded to criticisms over

²¹ Dina Danon, “What Do You Know? Sephardi vs. Mizrahi,” *Katz Center University of Pennsylvania*, Dec. 5, 2018, <https://katz.sas.upenn.edu/blog/what-do-you-know-sephardi-vs-mizrahi>.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Listed among these non-Muslim Middle Eastern groups are the Coptics, Baha’is, Assyrians, Iranians, Kurdish, Yazidis and Mizrahi Jewish.

Jewish exclusion from the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). In his letter on August 14, 2019, addressed to Assemblymembers Media and Weber,²⁴ “and other interested parties,”²⁵ Monteiro rebukes opposition to the ESMC on the basis of Jewish exclusion. He outlines the historically situated mission of Ethnic Studies as a discipline, further defining Ethnic Studies as a pedagogy for students of color taught with the intent of decolonizing academic narratives and recentering students who have been consistently erased from the dominant narratives historically and presently disseminated through United States schooling. “People of color,” he emphasizes, “is an idiomatic phrase referring to the peoples historically and continuously excluded from and oppressed by the project of Whiteness. We appreciate those other studies [Jewish Studies], but distinguish ourselves from them.”²⁶ Monteiro accentuates a belief that no room exists for Jewish Studies or Jewish history within the discipline of Ethnic Studies or the ESMC because Jewish Studies as a disciplinary field fails to embrace the Ethnic Studies pedagogy at all. In other words, the discipline of Jewish Studies neither re-centers people of color nor de-colonizes the academic canon. In Monteiro’s view,

*Jewish Studies for the most part was a project to understand the assimilation of American Jews into American Whiteness. The portion that was not assimilationist into Whiteness still did not focus on Jews of color, African/Black Jews, Asian Jews, etc., and definitely did not re-center Jewish Studies as a people of color, decolonial project.*²⁷

Monteiro argues, therefore, that Jewish studies has never been a part of Ethnic Studies and that should not change now. It is unclear whether he means the discipline of Jewish Studies as an entity has never been included Ethnic Studies programs, or that no Jewish scholars have ever

²⁴ Both members of the California legislature and people of color who are supporting the Jewish criticisms.

²⁵ Kenneth Monteiro, “What Is and Is NOT Ethnic Studies,” *California State University Council on Ethnic Studies*, Aug. 14, 2019.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

participated in Ethnic Studies programs—to which both have legitimate opposition. In Monteiro’s characterization, it seems that students who are Latinx and Jewish, or Black and Jewish, or Arab and Jewish, or anything other than White and Jewish, fit within the ESMC by the qualifier of their racial heritage non-inclusive of any Jewish communal identity.

Legislative Responses

In light of the dispute over the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), on August 12, 2019, the President of the California State Board of Education, Linda Darling-Hammond, along with the Vice President²⁸ and the Liaison to the Instructional Quality Commission,²⁹ wrote in a joint statement,

*Ethnic studies can be an important tool to improve school climate and increase our understanding of one another. A model curriculum should be accurate, free of bias, appropriate for all learners in our diverse state, and align with Governor Newsom’s vision of a California for all. The current draft model curriculum falls short and needs to be substantially redesigned.*³⁰

Ten days later, on August 22, 2019, Assemblymember Jose Medina (D-Riverside), who first presented and advocated for the passing of the Ethnic Studies model curriculum bill and to whom Kenneth Monteiro’s letter was directly addressed, voiced frustration with the outcome of the draft ESMC. Medina represents a majority Latinx district, is the Chair of Higher Education, Accountability and Administrative Review, a member of the Latino Legislative Caucus, and also one of the few non-Jewish members of the Jewish Caucus.³¹ He is also married to a Panamanian

²⁸ Ilene Straus.

²⁹ Feliza Ortiz-Licon.

³⁰ Linda Darling-Hammond, Ilene Straus, Feliza Ortiz-Licon, “Joint Statement on the Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” *California State Board of Education*, Aug. 12, 2019.

³¹ Assemblymember Jose Medina District 61, “Committees.” *Official Website of Assemblymember Jose Medina*. Accessed Jan. 20, 2020, <https://a61.asmdc.org/committees>.

Jew and has two Jewish children.³² Medina released a statement declaring that the ESMC must be revised in response to public comments, and extended the deadline for implementation an additional year to ensure the revisions are conducted with appropriate attention. He stated in a press release,

*I have decided to make AB 331 a two-year bill. I strongly believe in the tenets of Ethnic Studies [...] It is not a question of whether the subject itself is necessary but rather, how do we ensure the curriculum is comprehensive, rigorous, and inclusive enough. This underscores the importance of taking the time necessary to ensure we get the curriculum right.*³³

While Medina played a key role in passing the legislation which allocated for the creation of a state-wide Ethnic Studies curriculum, he did not himself serve on the Advisory Committee tasked with writing the draft. Concerning public feedback that the ESMC felt antisemitic, Monteiro contended:

*There were many things about it [the ESMC] that seemed to be anti-Semitic [...] I think the omission of the Jewish experience in the United States is glaring. I don't really think BDS should be included. And I also have an issue with the fact that anti-Semitism is not addressed [...] Just as my own children were proud of their Jewishness, they were, at the same time, proud of being Latino [...] I think that's what Ethnic Studies can do.*³⁴

This dispute, at its most quantifiable level, is about the fact that in the entire 350-page ESMC document, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement is directly referenced in five different instances, the words either Israel-Palestine, Palestinian(s) or Palestine included over twenty times, and the word “Jew” (never “Jewish” or “Judaism”), in total, four times. The

³² Gabe Stutman, “Bill Requiring State Ethnic Studies Curriculum Suspended After Controversy,” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, Aug. 26, 2019,

<https://www.jweekly.com/2019/08/26/bill-requiring-state-ethnic-studies-curriculum-suspended-after-controversy/>.

³³ Assemblymember Jose Medina District 61, “Assemblymember Medina Statement on AB 331 and Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.” *Official Website of Assemblymember Jose Medina*,

<https://a61.asmdc.org/press-releases/20190822-assemblymember-medina-statement-ab-331-and-ethnic-studies-model-curriculum>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

dispute is not—at least not entirely—that American Jewish history is excluded from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. If that were the case, this thesis would be an entirely different expenditure and the Jewish communal opposition realistically far less aggressive. While discussing Israel-Palestine has the capability to incite as much venom as it does sympathy, it would be a disservice to write this thesis unwilling to traverse in the depths of entanglement implied by the ESMC's enthusiastic inclusion of Israel-Palestine amidst a determined exclusion of Jewish Studies. I committed to exploring the dispute over the ESMC; the dispute exists as it does precisely because Israel-Palestine *is* included and Jews, as a group identity, are *not*.

The Research

The analyses presented in this thesis are compiled from written theory, oral interviews, archival texts, documentary films and governmental legislation. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is Ethnic Studies, the collegiate discipline, and in what ways does it inform the framework for the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)?
2. How does the current debate over the exclusion of Jewish Studies from the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) reflect larger historical and contemporary contexts of ethnoracial assignment in the United States?
3. By what mechanisms does the establishment American Jewish community transpose discourses of antisemitism into policy disputes, and how is the prioritization of Holocaust discourse a property stake in Whiteness?
4. How does the call to denounce colonialism in evidence of authentic solidarity within the liberal spaces of the American academy relate distinctly to American Jews? In what ways are the frameworks by which Jewish scholars in the secular academy delegitimize Zionism distinct from the ways in which non-Jewish scholars accomplishes the same feat?

This thesis will begin with an overview of the 1968-1969 Student Strike at San Francisco State College, the birth of the discipline of Ethnic Studies. In chapter one, I frame the tension between an apathetic, oppressive college Administration and students of color demanding educational, economic and social liberation. Such a form of empowerment was not solely the material establishment of a School of Ethnic Studies, but an imperative—a right—for the ideological liberation of students of color. The pedagogy which stresses teaching and learning counter-narratives as a mode of liberation through is most famously attributed to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian scholar and the intellectual father of *critical pedagogy*, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). The establishment of an Ethnic Studies program at San Francisco State College was the material representation of an ideological liberation from oppressive systems, which Freire terms *conscientização*, or “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”³⁵ Freire explains,

*the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves." Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors purposes; hence their [...] avoid[ce of] the threat of student conscientização.*³⁶

Using Freire, along with Michael Apple’s *Ideology and Curriculum* (2004) and Amahl Bishara’s *Back Stories* (2013), I contextualize how the institution of United States schooling is structured to serve the needs of White students in a hierarchy developed to perpetuate White privilege and maintain the oppression of students of color. This analysis considers how unequal privileges and functions of schooling manifest as both physical forms of power (administrative representation)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 74.

and ideological forms of power (representation on dominant curricular narratives, or the legitimized historical memory).

Chapter two explores one of the most convoluted questions asked of the American Jewish establishment: Are Jews White? By comparing Michael Rothberg's theory of *multidirectional memory*, Alexander Weheliye's *Holocaust exemplariness*, and Jon Stratton's *Holocaust as nation*, I outline my own theory of Jewish ethnoracial identity and privilege. Working from Cheryl Harris' *Whiteness as property*, I develop the theory of *Ashkenazi exemplariness*: the privileging of Holocaust memory in dominant canon that simultaneously obscures the histories of people of color in colonialism, genocide and slavery; and also suggests by inventing a Jewish identity exclusively rooted in the Holocaust, that all Jews inherited that same history and that, therefore, all Jews are White. Or, the privileging of Ashkenazi Jewish identity over non-White and non-European Jewish identities. Furthermore, *Ashkenazi exemplariness* obscures the work done by Jewish scholars throughout history to resist the Jewish establishment's dominion over what it means to *be* a Jew. By occluding any intra-communal dissent, *Ashkenazi exemplariness* purports the fallacious conception that all Ashkenazi Jews are supportive of, complicit in, and represented by *Holocaust exemplariness*. Finally, for proponents of *Ashkenazi exemplariness*, the reward is property stake in Whiteness, one which manifests as a power over narrative construction and legitimization of one's history to the benefit of policy influence, especially that of education policy influence.

Chapter three applies *Ashkenazi exemplariness* to a historic struggle over policy and representation power that occurred particularly between Ashkenazi Jews and communities of color. Through analyzing the 1968 New York Teachers' strike and the United Federation of

Teachers' (UFT) conflict with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community governing board, I highlight the significance of the global Jewish historical context of the moment in which these events played. In particular, how the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the 1967 War in Israel-Palestine shook the American Jewish psyche and, especially, the American Jewish establishment's relationship to Zionism and situated understanding of antisemitism. By analyzing Rabbi Meir Kahane and his leadership of the extremist, terrorist organization, the Jewish Defense League (JDL), I suppose that Kahane's appropriation of Black activist militarism in the form of Jewish Power—while staunchly disavowed by many American Jews—still set the framework for a modified, revisionist interpretation of the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. This analysis hopes, also, to illustrate how the phenomenon of a Jewish “racial middleness,” as Karen Brodtkin terms it in *How Jews Became White Folks* (1998), functions within the American Jewish establishment as an allusion to the Holocaust and antisemitism that paradoxically reminds of oppression in order to maintain a stake in the property of Whiteness that impedes the activism of communities of color.

Chapter four offers an analysis of the most contentious arguments presented for and against the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. In doing so, I highlight a distinction between the definition of “modern political Zionism” and the much more expansive and deeply rooted “Zionism” of diasporic Jewish identity. Further, I discuss the idiosyncrasy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a competition over the legitimacy of opposing claims to indigeneity. In the conclusion, amidst synthesizing numerous themes presented in this thesis to make an essential claim by providing a crucial analysis concerning the implications of an anti-Zionism requirement for solidarity within the liberal spaces of the American

academy—represented by the widespread, and rapidly growing, advocacy for BDS on many liberal American college campuses and within certain professional academic disciplines. Without taking a stance on the dispute concerning whether or not the BDS movement is itself antisemitic, I implore that within a culture of often aggressive BDS support and maintenance of the academic boycott, anti-Zionism becomes treated as a signifier of a Jewish individual's intellectual and moral worth. This dynamic places specifically unkind standards on Jewish students and scholars. To achieve the level of solidarity required by delegitimizing Zionism, often liberal Jewish scholars striving for acceptance—as intellectually and morally worthy—work from a particularly Jewish understanding of Zionism and are forced to determine that a Homeland for the Jewish people is not as much *illegitimate* as it is *unnecessary*; in other words, that Jews are a people of exile, of diaspora, and that the Jewish condition should remain as such. Such scholars must forsake the need for a Jewish nation in order to support the right for a Palestinian one—often driven by the demands of peers and scholars who are neither Palestinian nor Jewish.

This study is limited in a few ways. First, I did not task myself with deconstructing an entire history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; to do so adequately would take a fifty-year career in Middle East and religious studies research. Second, this thesis is based on the assumption that there are many people who can speak to the aims of BDS far better than I can do justice; I limit my analysis to research which I can put in conversations with contexts I am better equipped to handle. Finally, deciding to emphasize in this thesis ideas of Zionism, antisemitism and Israel-Palestine has been done under the realization that my brief work cannot account for the immense meanings and theories associated with the topics at hand.

CHAPTER ONE

Ethnic Studies: A Discipline, a Pedagogy

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) dispute emphasizes how schools function as both centers of cultural production and *reproduction*, the phenomenon of transposing onto students, through exclusionary, oppressive and often revisionist historical accounts, a dominant ideology. This chapter begins with an introduction to those theories of education which focalize processes and intents for constructing and teaching dominant curricular histories. I treat the institution of schooling as itself a site of cultural production and dissemination, wherein dominant ideologies are systematically transposed onto students via classroom narratives that treat the teaching of history, erroneously, as a neutral act. This section sets a groundwork from which, it is hoped, the reader can appreciate how schools might function within society as systems of institutionalized oppression, institutions within an even larger oppressive system. From this base can the reader appreciate the situated aims of Ethnic Studies pedagogy. The second section of this chapter highlights arguments presented by proponents of the current draft ESMC, who are opposed to any revisions—including Kenneth Monteiro’s letter, and a community-driven petition with more than 11,000 signatures. Both sources accentuate a specific, situated history of the discipline of Ethnic Studies, and a threat to the authenticity of Ethnic Studies should revisions be made to the ESMC. The third section documents the 1968-1969 Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) student strike at San Francisco State College, which led to the establishment of the first College of Ethnic Studies--the historical foundation-point to which proponents of the Ethnic Studies refer. The final section will consider the theoretical

backing of Ethnic Studies pedagogy, particularly as originated with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), who understood learning itself—the deconstruction of oppressive ideologies—as learning *oneself*. As liberation.

“Balanced Objectivity”: The Construction of Knowledge

Amahl Bishara, a professor of anthropology, describes in her book, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics* (2013), that the processes of knowledge production and dissemination in Western postcolonial contexts purport a concept of “balanced objectivity” that is both itself unbalanced and, in actuality, an assertion of subjectivity.³⁷ Bishara presents her analysis through ethnographic research on Western media representations of Israel-Palestine. She argues that Palestinian journalists, on whom the Western news media publications depend for on-the-ground reporting, are most often then removed from credits in the bylines of published works. Bishara writes, “Palestinians are integral to the production of U.S. news in the occupied territories, even though they are only occasionally recognized as authors of U.S. news, and though they rarely shape its narratives.”³⁸

Bishara stresses the irony of the Western notion of objectivity, the assumption that there exists an objective viewpoint disassociated from the subjective experience. As Paulo Freire phrases a similar notion in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), “One cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when

³⁷ Amahl Bishara, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism.”³⁹ Bishara accentuates that the United States and Israeli media companies exploit Palestinian journalists and then omit Palestinian perspectives from publication by claiming that Palestinian reporters, living in Palestine, cannot possibly attain “balanced objectivity”—in other words, that Palestinian journalists are incapable of producing media content free of bias. Bishara writes, “Palestinians are often seen as unable to be objective due to their political and geographic location. Their potential bias is [...] ‘understandable’ to many, because of the lives they have lived [...] as epistemic others.”⁴⁰

Bashara argues that to claim neutrality by refusing to allow Palestinian journalists self-representation is, in fact, choosing the side that is against them. Bishara’s theories relate to the study of schools and curriculum on four fronts: (1) Western schooling is a postcolonial context; (2) Schools are institutions of cultural preservation and perpetuate theories of neutrality; (3) the oppressed must be empowered to shape their own narratives; and (4) public school curriculum, school leaders, and government officials employ “balanced objectivity” in their defenses against school policy reform.

Michael Apple, a professor of education and scholar of curricular reform, describes schooling as “the structuring of knowledge and symbol [...] intimately related to the principles of social and cultural control in a society.”⁴¹ Quoting Raymond Williams, Apple provides, “educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment.”⁴² In recognition of this structure, Apple argues that educators should aim

³⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.

⁴⁰ Bishara, *Back Stories*, 51.

⁴¹ Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁴² Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (New York: Verso, 1989), 35–36, qtd. in *Ibid.*, 36.

consciously to “situate” their teaching strategies. He writes that educators,

*assume that our activity is neutral, that by not taking a political stance we are being objective [...] considerations of the justice of social life are progressively depoliticized and made into supposedly neutral puzzles that can be solved by the accumulation of neutral empirical facts, which when fed back into neutral institutions like schools can be guided by the neutral instrumentation of educators.*⁴³

Apple asserts that a distinction must be respected between the concepts of *hegemony* and *ideology*: two frameworks existing in opposition to each other. He defines hegemony as a “non-abstract” experience, “an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are *lived* [...] understood on a different level than ‘mere opinion’ or ‘manipulation.’”⁴⁴ This hegemony is “lived at such a depth [it] saturates the society to such an extent [it] even constitutes the limit of commonsense.”⁴⁵

Conversely, ideology serves a “dual role as a set of rules that give meaning and [...] rhetorical potency in arguments over power and resources.”⁴⁶ This transcription—the imposed meaning of ideology functioning antagonistically to lived experience—contradicts hegemony. To impose ideology is to delegitimize hegemony, to delegitimize students’ daily realities. Barbara Fields, a historian of the southern and nineteenth-century social history, provides a useful framework for understanding, and deconstructing, ideology. In “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America” (1990), she posits,

⁴³ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

*When virtually the whole of society, including supposedly thoughtful, educated, intelligent persons, commits itself to the belief in propositions that collapse into absurdity upon the slightest examination, the reason is not hallucination or delusion or even simple hypocrisy; rather, it is ideology. And ideology is impossible for anyone to analyze who remains trapped on its terrain.*⁴⁷

In “We Don’t Talk About Undocumented Status,” Emily Crawford and Noelle Arnold, both education researchers, highlight the lived implications of cultural reproduction for marginalized students within United States schooling. Writing particularly in consideration of students with undocumented status, they assert a distinction between school *climate* (the subjective experience) and school *culture* (the actual condition). They orient climate around four dimensions, which include: 1) safety, 2) teaching and learning, 3) relationships, and 4) environmental-structural.⁴⁸ The researchers emphasize, “a positive climate advances feelings of safety that then facilitates learning, a sense of connectedness among people within the school, and teaching and learning that supports collaboration, mutual trust, and respect.”⁴⁹ Therein, to “intentionally shape school climate” is to intervene compassionately in the schooling experiences of marginalized students.⁵⁰

I posit here that just as Western media exists within a postcolonial context dominated by the fallacies of objectivity, utilized in delusive defense of unequal representations within the dominant narratives of Eurocentrism, so too do the dominant narratives taught within schools in the United States perform the postcolonial, contextual aim of constructing, disseminating and

⁴⁷ Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of American,” *New Left Review* 100, no.1 (1990): 100, *New Left Review Archives*, retrieved from newleftreview.org/issues/I181/articles/barbara-jeanne-fields-slavery-race-and-ideology-in-the-united-states-of-america

⁴⁸ Emily Crawford and Noelle Witherspoon Arnold, “We Don’t Talk About Undocument Status...We Talk About Helping Children: How School Leaders Shape School Climate for Undocumented Immigrants,” *International Journal of Education Leadership and Management* 5, no. 1 (2017): 122, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2017.2840>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

recreating the fallacy of “balanced objectivity.” Such narratives of “balanced objectivity” delegitimize the subjectivity of marginalized student experiences and function rhetorically to oppose arguments for equitable school policy reform.

Ethnic Studies: A Discipline, a Pedagogy

Let us situate these theories in the context of Ethnic Studies. The database for public comments on the ESMC drew roughly 20,000 responses from the public, a constituency composed of students, parents, teachers, professors, doctors, and legislators, among others.⁵¹ Most of the reactions, over eighty percent, critiqued the ESMC for excluding Jewish American experiences, including critiques of the teaching of Israel-Palestine and advocacy for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.⁵² About 600 comments bemoaned the implementation of a state-sponsored Ethnic Studies curriculum at all, feeling that ownership over curricula should belong to either teachers or local school boards, or, separately, a general lack of belief in the efficacy, relevance or importance of Ethnic Studies programs in general.⁵³

However, nearly 400 of the comments posted to the California Department of Education website supported the draft “as is.”⁵⁴ A petition posted to Change.org following the media coverage of the dispute, “Defend Ethnic Studies for Our Students!” garnered 11,400 signatures from the public (as of January 7, 2020).⁵⁵ The petition listed over one hundred notable academics and advocacy groups who supported the motion to keep the ESMC draft as published in the

⁵¹ “Field Review Comments,” *California Department of Education*, accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://cde.app.box.com/s/thhiujs2lzxxrrn1uqqkvi6pmhk09sp>.

⁵² Elizabeth Castillo, “Delay in School Ethnic Studies Plan Would Bring More Voices to the Table,” *CalMatters*, September 22, 2019, <https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2019/09/california-delay-school-ethnic-studies-plan-more-voices/>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “Save California Ethnic Studies,” Change.org, accessed Jan. 7, 2020, <https://www.change.org/p/defend-ethnic-studies-for-our-students-save-our-curriculum-at-the-ca-dept-of-ed-now>

summer of 2019. The petition declared that any changes to the ESMC enacted in response to opponents of the draft would effectively be institutional racism:

*While revisions are a normal part of the process, **this curriculum is now being aggressively attacked from groups who have little to no experience in the discipline, which could result in the entire curriculum being delayed and fundamentally diluted by people without expertise in the field, who want to completely rewrite it. After 50 years of struggle [...] it cannot be taken away from us at this last second — doing so would be an act of institutional racism. Our students deserve an authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum.***⁵⁶

What this petition makes clear is the importance of honoring the disciplinary history of Ethnic Studies as it was founded, by and for students of color, nearly fifty years ago.

The statements presented in this petition suggest two important questions: First, do the obligations of any Ethnic Studies curricula incorporated at pre-collegiate, K-12 levels differ from those of a collegiate-level academic department? College majors are, for the most part, self-selective; a student wishing to take courses within the framework of Ethnic Studies may seek out those courses as they wish; similarly, a student wishing to take a college-level course in Jewish Studies can seek out such a course (It must be noted that there is no assumption these students have access to college admission at all). However, high school students, especially those students in public schools, have a comparatively minuscule freedom of choice over which classrooms they attend, or in which courses they are expected to participate.

Functioning from a firm belief that students of color in California have more than a right to an Ethnic Studies curriculum, that they deserve a curriculum suited to the particular needs and catered to the advancement of life chances, the ESMC dispute is special. One of the most well-known battles in recent memory over Ethnic Studies occurred in Arizona's Tucson Unified

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

School District. Where this program was distinct from the ESMC is that it was highly self-selective and therefore held no obligation to students who did not willingly participate in the course.⁵⁷ The ESMC is intended to be implemented in any California public school that so chooses to utilize its examples, particularly for grades nine through twelve.⁵⁸ It is a problem that curricula written by establishment educational institutions are not often held to the same standards currently being demanded of the ESMC; however, it seems that because the ESMC clearly states its aims to “develop culturally/community relevant and responsive pedagogies that are both revitalizing and sustaining,” “equip all students with the skills and knowledge to think critically about the world around them and to tell their own stories,” and “empower students to be engaged socially and politically [...] develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aid in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism,” that many critics are able to argue against the draft ESMC by claiming that the antithesis of these aims will likely be the experiences for non-included minority students.⁵⁹

The drafters introduce the ESMC as a curricular intervention for all students, describing in the introduction,

*At its core, the field of Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with an emphasis on experiences of people of color in the United States. Further, it is the interdisciplinary, loving, and critical praxis of holistic humanity--as educational and racial justice. It is from communities of color and our intergenerational worldviews, memories, experiences, identities, narratives, and voices. It is the study of intersectional and ancestral roots, coloniality, hegemony, and a dignified world where many worlds fit, for present and future generations.*⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Eren McGinnis and Sally Jo Fifer, *Precious Knowledge*, directed by Ari Luis Palos, Jacob Bricca, Amor Naim, Dos Vatos Productions, 2011.

⁵⁸ “Assembly Bill No. 2016, Pupil Instruction: Ethnic Studies,” *California State Legislature*, September, 13, 2016, retrieved from http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2016.

⁵⁹ “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” *Instructional Quality Commission*, 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Ethnic Studies as a discipline de-centers Whiteness and recenters people of color, a pedagogy that the ESMC believes should lead to the empowerment of all students, “regardless of race.”⁶¹ The ESMC is written for students of color in purposeful reaction to the historic and persisting failures of a school system structured oppressively against students of color. At the same time, the ESMC aims to both “center and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous, diasporic, familial, and marginalized knowledge”⁶² and offer a “multitude of stories, narratives, sources, and contributions of everyone in America so that all students can see themselves as part and parcel of the grand American narrative.”⁶³

While all students will benefit from the skills and knowledge base with which to critique histories and enduring systems of oppression in the United States—especially knowing schools themselves to be perpetrators of race- and class-based oppression—the implementation of an Ethnic Studies curriculum is a material repayment of the “education debt.”⁶⁴ Ethnic Studies repays this debt because, rather than strategizing to “close a gap,” it is “catalyzed by a righteous angst for justice and access to knowledge.”⁶⁵

Kenneth Monteiro, in his letter regarding the ESMC, chooses the title, “What is and is NOT Ethnic Studies.” He then defines people of color as “an idiomatic phrase referring to the peoples historically and continuously excluded from and oppressed by the project of Whiteness.”

⁶⁶ Monteiro’s inclusion of the word continuously is intentional and significant for a few reasons. First, communities who are discriminated against in the contemporary United States through

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁴ “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” *Instructional Quality Commission*, 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁶ Monteiro, “What Is and Is NOT Ethnic Studies.”

legal means live a distinct experience today than groups that have either never been discriminated against in the law or discriminated against historically and not currently. Second, exclusionary representation in the production or dissemination of knowledge is a practice of oppression. The State of California has mandated the teaching of the Holocaust since 1976,⁶⁷ which already positions Holocaust inclusion in the California public school canon more than forty years before Ethnic Studies.

Monteiro situates Ethnic Studies in the historical context in which it was established; in 1968, by the Third World Liberation Front student strike at San Francisco State College (SFSC).

⁶⁸ In their letter regarding the ESMC, the Jewish Caucus does not capitalize the discipline of Ethnic Studies, instead writing “ethnic studies.” It seems as if they have no conception of Ethnic Studies as a historic discipline. The fact that the arguments on either side are not materially related illustrates how the voices aiming to speak against each other are, in reality, speaking across each other, into entirely different voids. As it will become clearer, both sides are talking, but neither is really hearing.

The History of Ethnic Studies: San Francisco State College Students Strike, 1968-1969

The development of Ethnic Studies pedagogy should be situated in the campus activism of the late 1960s. The beginnings of Ethnic Studies as a collegiate discipline in the United States can be traced most concretely to San Francisco State College (SFSC) in 1968. As described by

⁶⁷ “Education Code-EDC,” *California State Legislature*, 1976, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=4.&title=2.&part=28.&chapter=2.&article=3.

⁶⁸ Now San Francisco State University.

Angus Johnston, a historian of higher education student activism, “At the end of the 1960s, students began to demand and win stronger roles in campus governance—participation on hiring and curriculum committees, seats on boards of trustees, representation on disciplinary bodies, autonomy for student governments, control over student fees.”⁶⁹ Examples include sit-ins in Greensboro, protests at Kent State University, demonstrations at Jackson State College, and, yes, the student strike at SFSC (and its sister-strike at University of California, Berkeley).⁷⁰

According to Johnston, “By 1967-68 the protest movement involved approximately 40 percent of American colleges and universities and had spread from its initial core to involve students from a wide range of social backgrounds.”⁷¹ It is also important that the creation of Ethnic Studies occurred in the city of San Francisco; Helene Whitson, a historian of the strike, inquires and answers:

*Why did this strike happen in San Francisco, a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city, known for its tolerance? Why did it happen at San Francisco State College, an innovative, liberal, four-year institution that was comparatively unknown? [...] San Francisco has been called ‘the city that knows how,’ an apt description of its progressive, stimulating atmosphere.*⁷²

Lasting for five months, from November 1968 to March 1969, members of the Black Student Union (BSU) and Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), with support from liberal faculty and student ally groups—Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)⁷³ and the Programs⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Angus Johnston, “Student Protests, Then and Now,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 62, no. 16 (Jan. 2015): Accessed January 19, 2020.

⁷⁰ Norris Johnson and William Feinberg, “Youth Protest in the 60s: An Introduction,” *Social Focus* 13, no. 3 (1980): 173 Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/20831158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷² Helene Whitson, “STRIKE!...Concerning the 1968-69 Strike at San Francisco State College,” accessed Jan. 19, 2020, http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=STRIKE!..._Concerning_the_1968-69_Strike_at_San_Francisco_State_College

⁷³ A popular student group in the 1960s that arose as part of the “New Left,” opposing bureaucratic hierarchy.

⁷⁴ A student group for the promotion of student power, community involvement union activism.

—protested the “authoritarian” and “racist” Administration and Trustees of San Francisco State College.⁷⁵ The strike not only encouraged similar demonstrations to manifest on other campuses, but it also, by positioning curricular reform as imperative to creating avenues towards prosperity for students of color, set a precedent for the development of similar Ethnic Studies programs in other schools.

Through their rhetoric, San Francisco State College (SFSC) student strikers emphasized the insufficiency of the current practices of their historically White institution, clearly observed through the predominance of White narratives in curricula and exclusions of meaningful historical and cultural considerations for students of color. In a pamphlet signed by Members of the Strike Committee, “Promise Them Anything, but Give Them Shuck,” students explained: “We went on strike [...] because we were sick of seeing our apathy used to support the denial of the right of Third World students and faculty.”⁷⁶ The student strikers assailed the conservative Trustees and Administrators for unjustly using their power over school policies, faculty appointments, and academic funding to further marginalize non-White students.

The student strike in many ways exposed the systematization with which academic institutions recreate societal structures of oppression and racism within classrooms and on their campuses. The Board of Trustees of SFSC, based on an analysis that measured only six of the Board’s total members (which really only needed that many to make this point),

⁷⁵ Whitson, “STRIKE!...Concerning the 1968-69 Strike at San Francisco State College.”

⁷⁶ “Promise Them Anything, but Give Them Shuck,” typescript of a pamphlet by Members of the Strike Committee, Nov. 18, 1968, UARC_0314_002, Box 30, Folder 249, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

control[ed] or represent[ed] firms with aggregate assets of \$46,500,000,000 and profits (1967) of \$930,832,000. Among the wealth that sits on those boards are representatives of at least 6 banks, 3 newspaper chains, 2 oil companies, 3 aircraft manufactures, 2 shipping lines, 3 airlines, a half dozen real estate and insurance companies, half the food packing industry [...] several chair stores [...] and 2 plant utilities.⁷⁷

This Board of Trustees consistently barricaded the college from funding any equitable reforms sought by students of color, including the creation of a Department of Black Studies or a School of Ethnic Studies.

A pamphlet hung around campuses, titled “No one is free unless everyone is free everybody out!” written by members of the BSU, characterized the Administration and Trustees through the Marxist framework of capitalist critique and institutionalized economic corruptness.⁷⁸ The authors debunked the ideological strategy of the college, which aimed not to empower students of color through emancipatory pedagogy, but rather to confine non-White students to predetermined roles in society. The authors rebuked,

We are not educated here: we are trained. We are trained to separate thought (clean) from emotion (unclean). We are trained to suck pre-packaged knowledge from experts like milk from Mommy’s breast. We are trained to let them grade us the way they want to grade us the rest of our lives--like sides of beef. We are trained not to question the assumptions underneath the classroom babble, because to challenge and tear down those assumptions would be to make ourselves free. The men who run and finance San Francisco State hire our brains and kill our spirits because they have an Empire to administer and we are the tools.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Dudley Swim--Who Are You? An Economic Description and Political Analysis of the Trustees and Regents,” typescript of a pamphlet by the Students for a Democratic Society Research Committee, Nov. 12, 1968, UARC_0305, Box 31, Folder 253, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

⁷⁸ “No one is free unless everyone is free everybody out!,” typescript of a pamphlet by the Black Student Union, Nov. 7, 1968, UARC_0328, Box 44, Folder 326, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Concerning the ignorance of the college towards both the communities in its neighborhood and its students from those neighborhoods, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action student group⁸⁰ released a document arguing for the necessity of SFSC to understand the space it occupied within the city of San Francisco, along with the broader communities amidst which it resided. They insisted the college “does not ‘reflect’ the pluralistic society that is San Francisco; it does not begin to serve the 300,000 non-white people who live in this urban community in poverty, ignorance and despair.”⁸¹ Through the college’s inability to acknowledge either its geographic or ideological positionally, it also failed to situate the needs of students of color within broader societal realities. Particularly, to these authors, that “the social expectation of the predominant white society [...] plays a crucial role in determining the behavior and fate of the Chinese in the U.S.”; “the desire to live up to the popular expectation has crippled the entire Chinese population.”⁸²

The November 1968 strike itself followed a year-long precedent of incidents and incursions. The tension on campus was so severe between students and the Trustees and Administration, a leadership seen as “tyrannical” big-money school policymakers clearly apathetic to the needs of students of color, that between 1967 and 1969 three different individuals acted in the post of college President—John Summerskill (1967-68), Robert Smith (1968), and Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa (1968-1973).⁸³ Students were aggravated by the Administration’s resolve to continue cooperating with Selective Services drafting during the

⁸⁰ A member of the San Francisco State College Third World Liberation Front.

⁸¹ “Chinatown and the Chinese,” typescript of a pamphlet by the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, Dec. 6, 1968, UARC_0329, Box 19, Folder 163, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

⁸² San Francisco State Strike Collection, “Chinatown and the Chinese.”

⁸³ “Presidents: Timeline,” San Francisco State University 1899-1999, accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://www.sfsu.edu/~100years/textonlycent/time/short/pres.htm>.

Vietnam War, and felt actively marginalized by a school “totally unsympathetic to student ideas and irrelevant to their needs.”⁸⁴ In 1967, the college suspended six students, four Black students and two White students, over conflicts at the school newspaper. The Black students had physically attacked the editor of the student newspaper, *The Gator*, after he wrote a racist op-ed; the White students had published pornographic material. President John Summerskill decided only to reinstate the two White students. Still one year before the strike was called, this decision earned him the charge “racism” to his name.⁸⁵ In fact, this event began the shout that would echo through campus daily: “Shut it down!”

Summerskill resigned amidst the hostility of this campus climate; in a February 1968 press conference, he incited the blame for not being able to appease his students with the California State government. He testified that the important investment of Californians in education was “being seriously eroded by political interference and financial starvation,” demonizing Governor Ronald Reagan’s administration for proposing budgets “inadequate to maintain operations at their present level” with “virtually no money to initiate new and needed programs” or “power to shift emphasis no matter how urgent our needs.”⁸⁶ In his final condemnation, Summerskill targeted the educational bureaucracy: “The government and the Trustees have to decide whether they are going to run the state colleges or place their confidence in the professionals to manage the campuses.”⁸⁷

Student aggravation continued to grow. A voice to their struggles appeared in the man of George Mason Murray; a student graduate teacher at the college, he was also the Minister of

⁸⁴ Whitson, “STRIKE!...Concerning the 1968-69 Strike at San Francisco State College.”

⁸⁵ “John Summerskill Resigns,” interview by Ben Williams, Eye on the Bay News, *CBS5 KPIX*, Feb. 22, 1968, audio, 6:47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Education for the Black Panther Party. Murray was hired in September 1968 as a teaching assistant for an introductory English class of 400 students admitted through the special admissions program, meaning these were mostly low-income students of color.⁸⁸ The special admissions program allocated spots to such students, specifically recruiting them through what is now the Educational Opportunity Program.⁸⁹ Murray taught and preached a pedagogy of liberation. As members of Students for a Democratic Society put it, “Murray is a spokesman for Black Liberation. He teaches that Black and Third World people must resist their oppressors by any means necessary.”⁹⁰ In a September 1968 interview with KPIX Eye on the Bay News, Murray argued:

*We're not just attacked because we're Black Panthers; we're attacked because we're Black people striving to politically educate the masses of the people here in America to create a new system of government that will be beneficial for all persons involved [...] We're being attacked by the power structure of this college and of California.*⁹¹

The Administration and Trustees, hearing these comments and rumors of the conversations that took place in Murray’s classrooms, objected to a teaching position allocated to a Black Panther. On September 26, 1968, the Trustees voted to ask President Smith to reassign Murray to a non-teaching post. The campus was already tense and Smith suspected, rightfully, that relocating Murray would upset fragile waters. President Smith abstained from relocating Murray for nearly a month. Governor Reagan supported the Trustees and Administration, joining in calling for Murray’s relocation. In an interview, Ben Williams asked President Smith: “A

⁸⁸ Helene Whitson, “S.F. State Strike 1968-69 Chronology,” accessed Jan. 19, 2020, http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=S.F._STATE_STRIKE_1968-69_CHRONOLOGY

⁸⁹ “History of the Educational Opportunity Program,” San Francisco State University, accessed Jan. 17, 2020, <https://eop.sfsu.edu/content/history-eop>.

⁹⁰ Students for a Democratic Society Research Committee, “Dudley Swim--Who Are You? An Economic Description and Political Analysis of the Trustees and Regent.”

⁹¹ “George Mason Murray Press Conference,” *CBS5 KPIX Eye on the Bay News*, San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive. 19 Sept. 1968, audio, 2:32.

number of politicians throughout the state, including the Governor [Reagan], have spoken badly about the appointments and some politicians have asked that you rescind the [Murray] appointment.”⁹² In response, Smith challenged: “There’s no legal base that we know of for doing that in the event I should have decided to do it.”⁹³

On October 31, 1968, when Smith still had not relocated Murray, the Chancellor of the college, Glenn Dumke, ordered him to suspend Murray. It is not entirely clear whether a suspension meant a temporary or permanent measure, but it was in reaction to Smith’s non-compliance up until that point. Instead, President Smith reassigned Murray away from classroom teaching. Although he refused to suspend Murray, Smith’s acquiescence to the Trustees particularly frustrated Black students, who saw the college placing the wants of wealthy Trustees over the needs of students. In frustration, they exclaimed,

It is when George Murray stands up and says Black people must fight the oppressors that their profits are threatened. The Trustees will use "any means necessary" to put an end to those fighting for Liberation on the campus just as the companies they represent will use "any means necessary" to break strikes and to stop Liberation Movements.”⁹⁴

During this time, the Black Student Union (BSU) joined forces with the Latin American Students’ Association, the Mexican American Students’ Organization and the Pilipino American Organizing Committee to create a Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State College.⁹⁵ Together they gave unity to student of color protest activism in a move directly responsive to their circumstances.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Students for a Democratic Society Research Committee, “Dudley Swim--Who Are You? An Economic Description and Political Analysis of the Trustees and Regent.”

⁹⁵ “Resolution, Third World Liberation Front,” typescript of demand for reinstatement of fired teachers, by the Third World Liberation Front, March 5, 1968, UARC_0267, Box 32, Folder 260, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

On November 1, 1968, President Smith officially gave in to the Trustees' demands and suspended George Mason Murray. For students in general, the conflict over bureaucratic appeasement and apathy towards students evidenced by Murray's suspension added to an already growing campus resentment. For students of color, Murray's suspension was the call to action. That same day, November 1, the TWLF published a list of fixed fifteen demands, including the rehiring of Murray to a teaching position.⁹⁶ Ten of the demands came directly from the BSU and the other five from the united TWLF coalition. With the list of demands, the TWLF promised that, should the college fail to respond adequately by November 6, 1968, they would begin a student strike.⁹⁷

On November 6, that cry arose. All over campus, shouting voices and posted pamphlets, all bold-facing, projected the same words: "On strike! Shut it down!" The five-month strike that followed was the longest in San Francisco State College history and the first to ever continue through a semester break.⁹⁸ The striking students demanded the establishment of a School of Ethnic Studies, composed of three areas studies and four sub-departments: Black Studies, Native American Studies and Asian American Studies; Native American Studies would include *La Raza* (Chicanx) Studies, and Asian American Studies would also include Chinese American Studies, Japanese American Studies, and Pilipino American Studies.⁹⁹ They demanded the School of Ethnic Studies be promised full autonomy over its curriculum and faculty appointments, with a written prohibition against Trustee efforts to dissolve any funding, appointments or programs.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Whitson, "STRIKE!...Concerning the 1968-69 Strike at San Francisco State College."

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ "Planning Program for School of Third World Studies," typescript issued by the School of Third World Studies Planning Committee, *n.d.*, UARC_0276, Box 1, Folder 6, University Archives, Educational Opportunity Program Archives, San Francisco, California, USA.

¹⁰⁰ Whitman, "STRIKE!...Concerning the 1968-69 Strike at San Francisco State College."

Additionally, the TWLF demanded 50 full-time teaching posts, 20 particularly allocated to the Black Studies department; special admissions for all non-White students who applied the following semester, and that all special admissions spots reserved for Black students unused in Fall 1968, given the tensions on campus, be allocated and filled the following Spring; and the employment of a Black financial aid officer, whom they believed could genuinely assist the particular financial needs of non-White students. The TWLF stipulated that no college student, worker, or teacher engaged in the strike should face any disciplinary action for their solidarity. In their final and most well-documented items, the TWLF demanded the immediate rehiring of George Mason Murray and the promise that “any other faculty person chosen by non-White people as their teacher be retained in their position.”¹⁰¹

Police were called to campus the first day the strike began.¹⁰² After a week of conflict and maintained police presence—not distinct at all from the presence of violence itself—President Smith closed the campus. The Trustees ordered Smith to immediately reopen it, but he believed an open discussion needed to happen first, that students needed to be welcome to voice their frustrations before classes could begin again. On November 15th, Smith held a meeting with school faculty and administrators to gauge solutions as to how the campus might be safely and successfully reopened. The faculty opposed the Trustees’ demands to immediately reopen the campus and proposed a convocation for students, faculty and the administration.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Whitson, “S.F. State Strike 1968-69 Chronology.”

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

The convocation began around the last week of November and lasted for three days. It was unsuccessful.¹⁰⁴ Writing in reflection of the convocation, the Student Strike committee admonished President Smith,

*Did he talk about the [...] demands? Did he indicate steps were being taken to meet them? No!! His bosses the Trustees, declared quite emphatically that there would be no negotiations [...] In other words, they belched a big fat NO to the demands and then sent their marionette, Smith, to disguise that belch to make it acceptable to the campus community.*¹⁰⁵

Statements by the Progressive Labor Party Student Club followed with similar frustration:

*Thousands of students saw that Smith avoided the issues and avoided the 15 demands, exposing himself through these actions as a puppet of the Board of Trustees and the corporate interests they represent [...] The fact of the matter is that an ever-growing majority of students were organizing in active opposition to the policies of Smith, the Board of Trustees, and the whole nature of education in this country.*¹⁰⁶

President Smith resigned after the convocation and the Trustees appointed Dr. S. I. Hayakawa. President Hayakawa increased police presence and enforced an “authoritarian” leadership far more than Smith ever did.¹⁰⁷ While this strike did not encounter the same violence of military presence as its sister-strike at UCLA, from the first day Hayakawa stepped into his new post, he sustained police administration on the college campus.

Amidst a school shutdown with no end in sight, Hayakawa closed the campus one week early before the technical end of the Fall 1968 semester. In the published narrative, Hayakawa hoped for a “cooling off” period.¹⁰⁸ What this probably meant more accurately is he hoped

¹⁰⁴ “Rely on the People-Build the Strike!” typescript by the Student Strike Committee, Dec. 11, 1968, UARC_0316, Box 30, Folder 249, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

¹⁰⁵ “No Negotiations/Smith Unmasked,” typescript by the Student Strike Committee, Nov. 20, 1968, UARC_0313, Box 30, Folder 249, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

¹⁰⁶ “Pig Wednesday,” typescript by the Progressive Labor Party Student Club, *n.d.*, UARC_0307, Box 23, Folder 199, San Francisco State Strike Collection, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco, California, USA.

¹⁰⁷ Whitson, “S.F. State Strike 1968-69 Chronology.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

closing campus for an extended winter break would diminish the student drive to protest and weaken the coalition. However, the strike was too strong: faculty were now participating, along with an entire cohort from the American Federation of Teachers,¹⁰⁹ and two student groups had taken responsibility for pushing solidarity among White students. Whatever Hayakawa's motive for closing the campus, the movement was far too strong to disappear. When the campus reopened on January 6, 1969, for the semester, it was not just to the chorus of student protesters. Roughly 350 teachers from the San Francisco local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers formed a picket line around the campus.¹¹⁰

Not until the end of March, roughly two months after the 1969 Spring semester reopening and five months after the beginning of the strike, did a resolution get signed.¹¹¹ On March 20, 1969, the BSU, the TWLF, and the President's Select Committee, comprised of six faculty members and administrators appointed by President Hayakawa, negotiated and signed a joint agreement.¹¹² The agreement took effect on March 21, 1969, officially ending the strike. A few resolutions of the joint-agreement included: (1) The college will create and fund a School of Ethnic Studies and a Black Studies Department, which can both grant a Bachelor's degree and hold autonomy over their hiring, curricular practices, and funding; (2) The School of Ethnic Studies will include four subdivisions--Native American Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, and La Raza (Mexican American) Studies; (3) SFSC promises full-time pay for professors hired in these programs, active recruitment of non-White students, the creation of a community board to support these students and their needs; (4) The joint committee, accepting

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ "Joint Agreement," typescript of strike resolutions, March, 18, 1969, Special Collections, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, USA. Retrieved from <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187991>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

that President Hayakawa still fully intends to continue with scheduled disciplinary hearings, proposes fair punishments for various charges; (5) The SFSC community board for minority students, established with this joint-agreement, will be granted the right to determine the rehiring of George Mason Murray; and (6) A call for the immediate withdrawal of police from the campus.¹¹³

In his letter regarding the ESMC, Monteiro emphasizes this historical foundation point for Ethnic Studies because it not only represents the establishment of the discipline, but also the historical situatedness from which Ethnic Studies understands its pedagogy. A Monteiro phrased.

*Before 1968, many humanities, social science and science disciplines studied ethnicity and race, but they just did so poorly and in a manner dangerous to people of color, the various peoples where were considered non-White and were historically oppressed for being non-White in America, African, Asian, Latino and Native Americans.*¹¹⁴

Ethnic Studies, when integrated into K-12 schools, works similarly; research has shown that ethnic minority students, who are systematically disserved in the United States public school system, benefit from these programs immensely.¹¹⁵ On the pedagogical level, what makes Ethnic Studies work?

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Documents from the student strike at San Francisco State College characterize the ideological and emancipatory imperative to liberate oneself from the blind acceptance of a status quo, one systematically crafted to oppress and negate your needs. As students portrayed during the San Francisco State strike:

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Monteiro, "What Is and Is NOT Ethnic Studies."

¹¹⁵ Sleeter, "The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies."

*The monopoly capitalists and their firms which control our universities have but one thing uppermost in their minds—that is to maintain their economic and political position. They do this in the US by exploiting Black, Third World and white laborers and abroad by exploiting Third World people in Asia, Latin America and Africa [...] This keeps the oppressed peoples of all colors fighting each other rather than uniting against their common enemy—the monopolists [...] To believe in the Liberation of oppressed peoples is to oppose their oppressors. The Trustees and Regents are the oppressors having a vested interest in maintaining that role.*¹¹⁶

The concept of self-realization as liberation is central to the educational praxis of critical pedagogy and Ethnic Studies. Most scholars will cite Paulo Freire as the philosophical founder of critical pedagogy; a liberation of oneself (or one's community) by oneself (or one's community). In fact, the Introduction section to the ESMC references Freire in its genealogy of Ethnic Studies scholars.¹¹⁷ They describe Freire's theory of "banking" versus "problem posing" education, the latter wherein educators "creat[e] a learning environment where both students and teachers are equally active participants in the co-constructing knowledge."¹¹⁸

Paulo's Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), argues that any battle for domination, particularly based on his experiences in 1960s Brazil, remains trapped within the ideological confines of hierarchies imposed by Western colonial societies, unless one liberates themselves from that ideology itself. Freire believes that unless that such ideological liberation occurs, it will remain the case that oppressed individuals, once emancipated from oppression, transform in their newfound power into the recreators of the oppression they once struggled against. As he describes, "almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed,

¹¹⁶ Students for a Democratic Society Research Committee, "Dudley Swim--Who Are You? An Economic Description and Political Analysis of the Trustees and Regent."

¹¹⁷ A list which also includes names such as W.E.B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Carter G. Woodson, Carlos Bulosan, Grace Lee Boggs, Frantz Fanon, Rodolfo Acuña, Vine Deloria Jr., Gloria Anzaldúa, and bell hooks.

¹¹⁸ Instructional Quality Commission, "California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum," 17.

instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors.’ ”¹¹⁹

Why is it the case that, once given power, formerly oppressed people may then proceed to recreate oppressive systems of power rather than dismantle them? Freire posits that, having lived so long within an ideological system of race-, class- and gender-based qualifiers for (in)equality, obtaining a position of power and acting any differently than the former oppressive class requires the liberation of oneself from the ideological framework of those hierarchies. He writes, “The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity.”¹²⁰

Freire terms both the necessity for recognizing the confines of ideology and the ability to reject its institution, “*conscientização*.” English-speaking scholars usually translate this Portuguese phrase as “consciousness raising” or “critical consciousness.” According to Freire’s analysis, “The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*.”¹²¹

Notably, when in 2010 the Arizona State Legislature banned the twelve-year-old *Raza*/Mexican American Ethnic Studies program in Tucson Unified School District (TUSD)—at the time serving over 1,500 students across six high schools—it was exactly Freire’s book that the conservative White legislators quoted.¹²² Vitriolically. The passing of Arizona House Bill 2281 banned the teaching of Ethnic Studies with a specific ban on Freire’s book directly.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹²² McGinnis and Fifer, *Precious Knowledge*.

¹²³ In 2017, seven years after the HB 2281 ban on Ethnic Studies, A. Wallace Tashima, a U.S. Circuit Judge in the District of Arizona, ruled the ban unconstitutional, declared it had been “enacted and enforced, not for a legitimate educational purpose, but for (i) an invidious discriminatory racial purpose, and (ii) a politically partisan purpose.”

At San Francisco State College, student strikers believed—from the situated knowledge of their lived experiences—that a college unwilling to provide for the development of *conscientização* was designed against the purposes of educating them. Moreover, it was designed with the purposes of confining students of color to only those roles and ideas desired by the White establishment. The strikers drew heavily from Marxist theory, a common trend among activists during this period. The metaphor of the school as a factory and students as parts in a machine held rhetorical potency because the demands of the strike were each clearly tied to grievances against the Trustees and Administration in an unequal battle determined by economic rather than a moral imperative. The students pointed out: “When the cry ‘violence’ is raised, we should ask, “Violence by whom and against what?”¹²⁴

The current dispute regarding the ESMC emphasizes how this structural relationship between schooling and oppression has not changed, and Kenneth Monteiro’s arguments give voice to the residue of a history that to this day perpetuates the erasure, omission and disempowerment of students of color. The goal of the ESMC, as with the student strike at San Francisco State College, is to make room for and nourish the creation of *conscientização* among the students who deserve it. However, the dispute over the ESMC is prefaced upon the exclusion of Jewish history for reasons of both assimilation into Whiteness and assumed complicity in Zionism. The nature of this ESMC dispute challenges whether there exists any room within *conscientização* for “balanced objectivity.” (In fact, the seeming incompatibility of these concepts masks that maybe neither need exist if not for the other.) The following chapter situates

Tashima declared the ban a violation of Plaintiff students’ constitutional, first and fourteenth amendment rights. (“On Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Arizona,” United States District Court, District of Arizona, Sep. 22, 2017.)

¹²⁴ Members of the Strike Committee, “Promise them anything, but give them shuck.”

how assimilation and “Otherness,” power and liberation, are inherently intertwined upon a system that crafts Whiteness inherently opposite Blackness and thereby also allows for the canonization of certain communities’ cultural histories over others’. In other words, why American Jews are not quite as White as dominant discourse represents them.

CHAPTER TWO

Jewish Whiteness: The Holocaust, a Nation

In the United States, power over schooling and education policy, including curriculum creation, is allocated unequally and intentionally against people of color. Discussing any dispute over schooling must then be particularly situated within an infrastructure that perpetuates racial discrimination and racism itself. That a curriculum for students of color faces pushback is not a unique development; nor is the particularity of the pushback voicing itself as a comparison of oppressions, a hierarchy of histories. Jane Anna Gordon, a political theorist with special interest in education and Africana political thought, has argued that “not all difference is equivalent”; an argument against conflating one group’s history with another, and forgoing the situatedness of either of those histories to make the comparison.¹²⁵ Describing the work of W. E. B. DuBois, Gordon posits that his theory of *dual consciousness* is attributable solely to the Black American experience, that any attempt to analyze another group through his framework, providing the examples of Jewish Americans or Asian Americans, convolutes and coopts the terms intended, historically situated meaning.¹²⁶ By this outline, interceding in the processes of communities of color who are fighting for equitable curricular reforms by weighing one’s own, separate historical claims to marginalization mistakes equality for equity.

It is modern consensus among progressive scholars that the ideology of race in the United States was founded in the particular, violent history of European imperialism, colonialism, indigenous genocide and slavery in the Americas. A colonial nation from its infancy, the regime

¹²⁵ Jane Anna Gordon, “The Gift of Double Consciousness: Some Obstacles to Grasping the Contributions of the Colonized,” in *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, ed. Nalini Persram (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007), 155.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 152.

of slavery and the genocide of indigenous peoples have not disappeared; the residue of their ideological establishment persists today in the infrastructures of the United States, a nation whose official historical narrative still avoids the implications of present-day settler status.

Barbara Fields, a scholar of American history, identifies that the ideology of race was founded in a binary formed opposite and distinct from “Blackness.” Furthermore, this binary was as equally assured as it was manifested through the laws worded deliberately to justify and maintain the ideology of “race” itself. She writes, “the Court had to perform intellectual contortions to prove that non-[Blacks] might be construed as members of races in order to receive protection under laws forbidding racial discrimination.”¹²⁷

Proceeding from Fields, Cheryl Harris posits, in “Whiteness as Property” (1993), that one historical and contemporary significance of racial distinction in the U.S. is the function of privileging material claims to “property” for Whites; property itself the privilege of Whiteness and Whiteness the property.¹²⁸ Harris centralizes Fields’ initial construction of race within the law in the United States by expanding upon how the creation, enforcement and interpretation of legality serve the primary function of maintaining Whiteness as property. She writes, “following the period of slavery and conquest, white identity became the basis of racialized privilege that was ratified in law as a type of status property [...] the law’s ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline.”¹²⁹

Harris traces the evolution of property rights prioritized by Whiteness, from the colonial era to contemporary Supreme Court cases. She illuminates how even as the conceptions of

¹²⁷ Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of American,” 97.

¹²⁸ Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707-1791, doi: 10.2307/1341787

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1714.

Whiteness as property have evolved, they maintain the purpose of existing antithetical to Black and Native American peoples. She writes, “The origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights,” wherein slavery involved a property over the autonomy of body and colonialism over the autonomy of land.¹³⁰ Harris specifically analyses how Court rulings on affirmative action cases have protected this property of Whiteness in the form of granting access to schools and jobs over the actual intended reform of affirmative action to benefit students of color. She writes of rulings that deny access to people of color under the pretense of “reverse discrimination,”

*the parameters of appropriate remedies are not dictated by the scope of injury to the subjugated, but by the extent of the infringement on settled expectations of whites [...] grounded in the perception that the existing order based on white privilege is not only just “there,” but also is a property interest worthy of protection.*¹³¹

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham furthers the idea of Whiteness as property, especially as it relates to the female body, in “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race.”¹³² Higginbotham emphasizes how the prescriptions of ownership over one’s body in the slave regime, conflated particularly during the rise of the women’s rights movement, existed along racial far more than gender lines, privileging not upon gender but upon race. As she writes, “For black and white women, gendered identity was reconstructed and represented in very different, indeed antagonistic, racialized contexts.”¹³³ Through race-based gender distinctions, Whiteness as property delineated both the literal body and the children born of those bodies—the

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 1768.

¹³² Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 251-274, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174464>.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 258.

property of Whites, the property of Whiteness—but it also created separate terminology with which to designate White and Black women from each other. Higginbotham explains,

*segregation's meaning for gender was exemplified in the trope of "lady." Ladies were not merely women; they represented a class, a differentiated status within the generic category of "women." [...] White prostitutes, along with many working-class white women, fell outside its rubric. But no black woman, regardless of income, education, refinement, or character, enjoyed the status of lady.*¹³⁴

Higginbotham provides a memorable example of this linguistic differentiation as a stake in the property of Whiteness.

*Sojourner Truth's famous and haunting question, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" laid bare the racialized configuration of gender under a system of class rule that compelled and expropriated women's physical labor and denied them legal rights to their own bodies and sexuality, much less the bodies to which they gave birth.*¹³⁵

The canonical narrative of the United States that dominates centers of schooling functions with the purpose of ingraining the ideological assumption which presents the material circumstances of property as inevitable. Michael Apple, a scholar of education policy, curriculum and instruction, offers the term "official knowledge," the interplay between explicit academic narratives received in the process of schooling and the implicit ideologies underlying the construction and dissemination of those narratives.¹³⁶ The teaching of official knowledge does not only obscure non-White historical memories; especially in classrooms, the ideological confines of official knowledge fail to provide appropriate lesson content to engender meaningful reflection or thoughtful questioning among students. Therein, the curricular education fails to empower.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹³⁶ Michael Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

Schooling of official knowledge actually *disempowers* marginalized students.¹³⁷ There is a gap in student wellbeing and rates of attrition in the United States that widens across racial and class divides. According to the ESMC, “What is often called the ‘achievement gap’ between students of different racial backgrounds, is recontextualized [...] as the opportunity gap, and/or what Gloria Ladson-Billings framed as the education debt.”¹³⁸ The ESMC defines, “This debt refers to what students of color in the United States are owed after centuries of educational trauma, dehumanization, and enforced sociopolitical, cultural-historical, economic, and moral constraints via the education system.”¹³⁹ The debt exists for the very reason that academic success, representative course content, and presence in the school itself are ascribed value through the law as properties of Whiteness.

To provide a contemporary example, in 2010 when the Arizona State House of Representatives passed House Bill 2281 to outlaw the teaching of Tucson Unified School District’s (TUSD) twelve-year running *Raza/Mexican American Studies* program, the official ban’s prohibitions clearly perceived schooling as a property right of Whiteness, and the teaching of a counter-narrative to White Supremacy conflated through “reverse discrimination.” The bill’s language made deliberate effort not to name the TUSD program directly in their policy discourse, and in fact obfuscated the real successes of the program.¹⁴⁰ Spearheaded by John Huppenthal—the State Superintendent of Public Education—and Tom Horne, two conservative,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Instructional Quality Commission, “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Research found students who participated in the program were 101% (2011) and 168% (2008) more likely to pass the reading section of the state AIMS test, and 118% (2008) and 64% (2010) more likely to pass the state-standardized AIMS test overall. Additionally, students who participated in the program were 51% (2009) and 108% more likely to graduate on time, and 46% (2011) and 150% (2008) more likely to graduate in five years than students who did not participate. Cabrera, et. al., “An empirical analysis of the effects of Mexican American Studies participation on student achievement within Tucson Unified School District.”

White Arizona legislators, the State House approved the ban on the teaching of Ethnic Studies.¹⁴¹

The official language of the bill stated,

The legislature finds and declares that public schools pupils should be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people [...]

- A. A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following:*
- 1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government*
 - 2. Promote resentment towards a race or class of people*
 - 3. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group*
 - 4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals¹⁴²*

Legislative meeting records and policy discourse surrounding House Bill 2281 frame the TUSD Ethnic Studies Course as advocating ethnic solidarity and resentment towards White people. John Huppenthal argued in an interview that the sole purpose of the program was to “develop ethnic solidarity.”¹⁴³ Huppenthal framed his opposition to Ethnic Studies as fighting for equality while at the same time underscoring his sentiments with bigotry. During a rally, Huppenthal expressed his solidarity with civil rights struggles as his moral imperative to oppose Ethnic Studies. He said,

In 1963, I participated in the march on Washington where Martin Luther King said he wanted his son to be judged “by the quality of his character” and “not by the color of his skin” and I am still fighting for that now, against [...] dividing students up by ethnicity and treating them separately by ethnicity.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ “Senate Engrossed House Bill 2281,” 49th State of Arizona. Legislature, *Arizona House of Representatives*, 2nd sess. (2010), <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf>

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴³ “The Case Against Ethnic Studies,” directed by Ari Luis Palos, *Precious Knowledge* (clip), Public Broadcasting Service, Mar. 17, 2012, audio, 2:58, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/videos/the-case-against-ethnic-studies/>.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

One breath later, in response to the protesting, predominantly Latinx students behind the camera, Huppenthal lost his ethos: “And, the rudeness, behind us, I think shows the rudeness that they teach to their kids.”¹⁴⁵ Who are they? And if “they” are someone else’s kids, then as the State Superintendent of Public Education, where do “they” belong in your schools? For what rhetorical purposes, under what political imperatives, do “their kids” become *your* students?

Huppenthal’s words are particularly egregious as they directly contradict the defenses he makes against Ethnic Studies on account of an apparent “non-existence” of ethnic divides.

*In the human being there is a primitive part that is tribal, and that will say, “I want to be members of my own tribe, of my own race,” and that sort of thing. And the function of civilization and the function of our public school system is to get people to transcend that...There are better ways to get students to perform academically and to want to go into college than to infuse them with racial ideas.*¹⁴⁶

Huppenthal did not oppose ethnic solidarity, as he claimed, because he thought ethnic differences unimportant. He opposed Ethnic Studies because, to him, teaching ethnic minorities to critically examine their ethnic-identities within histories of contingency positioned Whiteness as oppressive; to him, that was not okay. In this case, the power to define (i.e. assign) identity, and the power to do so through curriculum, was a property reserved for Whiteness. Huppenthal articulated, “They were doing a very simplistic struggle between the “oppressor” and the “oppressed.” And they were going to identify Whites as oppressors and Hispanics as the oppressed.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Julie Depenbrock, “Ethnic Studies: A Movement Born of a Ban,” *NprEd*, National Public Radio, Aug. 13, 2017, audio transcription, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/13/541814668/ethnic-studies-a-movement-born-of-a-ban>,

The point to be made here is that schooling in the United States is bureaucratically limited and structurally oppressive. A distinction should be made, however, between these cases such as House Bill 2281, and the current dispute over the ESMC. Arizona's ban on Ethnic Studies was the silencing and delegitimizing of people of color histories that cared little for all students who were not White and believed the wellbeing of White students a priority above any other. Huppenthal seems to have not even considered the student protestors behind him as his own students. "Wellbeing," the result of students seeing themselves through empowering representations in classroom narratives, is also the intellectual and emotional reckoning with seeing oneself through the contingency of history. It is true, for White students, that deconstructing the dominant narratives necessitates learning to recognize one's complicity in a violent history and residual presence of settler colonialism: the "Whites as oppressors," as Huppenthal so eloquently puts it.

The dispute regarding the ESMC differs from the Arizona ban on account that, for the most part, Jewish exclusion-based criticisms do not refute the importance of Ethnic Studies itself; in fact, both the letter from the Jewish Caucus and the letter from the Mizrahi and Sephardic organizations express support for the concept of the curriculum. Their complaint is that they wish to be included; and this is different from Huppenthal. While the complaint, especially as phrased by the Jewish Caucus, misunderstands the particular history of Ethnic Studies as a discipline, it does not negate the curriculum's imperative.

Kenneth Monteiro's letter regarding the ESMC suggests that Jewish Studies is not included in the curriculum because assimilation disqualifies Jews from authenticity with Ethnic Studies. He writes,

*Jewish Studies for the most part was a project to understand the assimilation of American Jews into American Whiteness. The portion that was not assimilationist into Whiteness still did not focus on Jews of color, African/Black Jews, Asian Jews, etc., and definitely did not re-center Jewish Studies as a people of color, decolonial project.*¹⁴⁸

A multifaceted case herein lies: Holocaust memory has, definitely, ingrained itself with dominance in the Western canon. And that memory creates, for a variety of reasons, Ashkenazi Whiteness. But is the Holocaust, or even the Ashkenazi European experience, the only Jewish immigrant story?

Importantly, at the same time right-wing extremists attack synagogues, they also rhetoricize the Holocaust. White Supremacy's ideological framework often accepts at least the *reality* of the Holocaust—unlike those realities of indigenous genocide or racial slavery—just enough to invert its own bigoted outlook by reconstructing the liberation struggles of people of color within the discourse of actual Nazi Germany. A post Huppenthal made on Twitter accentuates this dynamic. He proclaimed, “The Mexican American Studies classes use the exact same technique that Hitler used in his rise to power. In Hitler’s case it was the Sudetenland. In the Mexican American Studies case, Aztlán.”¹⁴⁹ That dominant conversations about Jews are so often tied up in the Holocaust, and that the Holocaust is itself a history particular to a regional geography not inclusive of vast swaths of Jewish heritage, obscures both the reality that at least twenty percent of American Jews are not White, and that work has been done by progressive American Jews (outside of the establishment) to substantially reframe this narrative.

¹⁴⁸ Monteiro, “What Is and Is NOT Ethnic Studies.”

¹⁴⁹ Valerie Strauss, “Arizona’s Ban on Mexican American Studies was Racist, U.S. Court Rules,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 23, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/08/23/arizonas-ban-on-mexican-american-studies-was-racist-u-s-court-rules/>

The case is, the most vocal Jewish-based criticisms of the ESMC still support the implementation of an Ethnic Studies curriculum. While some believe the curriculum was drafted with an antisemitic bias, they do not argue that people of color have no right to an Ethnic Studies curriculum. Rather, the exact manner by which Jews are excluded from the curriculum, they fear, will negatively impact the wellbeing of Jewish students. More so, today is a particularly harmful period in American history to place Jewish students in such a battle against their peers. The California Jewish Caucus cites that “Nearly 60 percent of hate crimes motivated by religious bias in 2017 were anti-Jewish.”¹⁵⁰ The letter from the California Mizrahi and Sephardi organization adds, “2018 FBI statistics have noted, hate crimes against Jews have risen by 37% accounting for over half of religious-based hate crimes in the United States.”¹⁵¹

At the same time antisemitism feels real and growing to large numbers of American Jews, to drafters of the ESMC, the label “antisemitism” only emphasizes a reason to resist Jewish inclusion: Jews calling the ESMC antisemitic may be perceived in the same vein as Huppenthal’s assertion that teaching students to resent “Whites as oppressors” is grounds for opposing the initiative. This is true only if we function from the assumption that (a) all Jews are White, (b) all Jews are complicit in Zionism, and (c) Zionism has one, universal definition understood by all parties. Negotiating the accuracies and inaccuracies of characterizing all American Jews along these lines is central to this thesis; the next section will, therefore, explore how it became the conception that all Jews are White.

¹⁵⁰ California Legislative Jewish Caucus, “Letter to the Instructional Quality Commission.”

¹⁵¹ Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA) and Ten Undersigned, “Sephardic and Mizrahi Communal Response to the Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum of California’s Department of Education” Aug. 4, 2019.

Are Jews White?

In his book, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), Michael Rothberg presents a thesis on the creation of historical memory and competitions over representation within its telling. His concept of “multidirectional memory” is framed in contradistinction from “competitive memory.” He explains the latter,

*collective memory obeys a logic of scarcity: if a Holocaust Museum sits on the Mall in Washington (or just off of it, as is the actual case), then Holocaust memory must literally be crowding the memory of African American history out of the public space of American collective consciousness.*¹⁵²

Rothberg posits, the problem with collective memory is that it creates the notion of “competitive memory”; that is, “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources.”¹⁵³ These resources include a hierarchical position in the collective memory, positions to which are inherently related material resources. He proposes *multidirectional memory*, an interaction between differing claims to history, “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.”¹⁵⁴ Rothberg’s work particularly uses and provides examples for multidirectional memory by refocusing the dominance of Holocaust memory in the collective consciousness not as a hierarchical superior but as part of the multifaceted, contingent growth in postcolonial studies. Rothberg writes that a “shift in perspective” allows us to recognize that while opposing claims, “both speak of Holocaust memory as if it blocks memory of slavery and colonialism from view (the model of competitive memory), they actually use the presence of widespread

¹⁵² Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Holocaust consciousness as a platform to articulate a vision of American racism past and present.”¹⁵⁵

Rothberg provides a historical analysis of the mechanisms by which the Holocaust solidified within the Western consciousness. He describes the moment most contemporary scholars generally cite to understand how Holocaust memory gained its place in the collective memory. In 1960, the Israeli Mossad captured Adolf Eichmann in Argentina—a leader of the Nazi regime, directly responsible for the implementation of every step in the “Final Solution” (gas chambers).¹⁵⁶ In the summer of 1961, Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem. “Anchored by the dramatic testimony of III Holocaust survivors,” Rothberg writes, “the Eichmann trial brought the Nazi genocide of European Jews into the public sphere for the first time as a discrete event on an international scale.”¹⁵⁷ From the eye witness testimonies against Eichmann also emerged the “a new public identity: the Holocaust survivor.”¹⁵⁸ Adolf Eichmann was charged with war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity; In the second and, to this day, last court-sanctioned execution carried out by the Israeli government, Eichmann was executed by hanging on June 1, 1962.¹⁵⁹ Prime Minister Ben Gurion explicitly designed the trial and its broadcast to portray the Holocaust, in his own words, “as the only crime that has no parallel and human history.”¹⁶⁰

Given the way it was represented and gained legitimacy through the Eichmann trials, many scholars uncritically perceive this event as the moment the Holocaust became framed as

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ “About the Eichmann Trial,” *Yad Vashem, n.d.*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/eichmann-trial/about.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 176.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁵⁹ “About the Eichmann Trial,” *Yad Vashem*.

¹⁶⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 176.

part of a long history of Jewish suffering in the modern times.¹⁶¹ There is no doubt that the Eichmann trial skyrocketed into conversation a “near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse” that had, until then, for fifteen years, only mentioned the Holocaust in whispered tones.¹⁶² Rothberg offers a reimagination of this history that rejects the Eichmann narrative as itself “a particularly Israeli worldview.”¹⁶³ He analyzes works less publicized but actually produced before the Eichmann trial, which may suggest a non-competitive, multidirectional memory of solidarity. As an example, he discusses the film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), which depicts a Holocaust survivor in France as a personal history (and not thematic endeavor) before the cohort membership to the title “Holocaust survivor” even solidified to contend that the mass recognition of the barbarity of the Holocaust allowed the space for reclamations of other, global and historical brutalities against other communities.¹⁶⁴

Conversely, Alexander Weheliye argues in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014) that the dominant trend in the Western academy which treats the Holocaust as exemplary, as the “paradigmatic exemplariness”—“the apex in the telos of modern racializing assemblages”—elevates the Holocaust not only above but to the omission of histories of racial oppression as they existed beyond the continent of Europe.¹⁶⁵ Weheliye condemns theories of race that do not encompass any histories beyond Europe, distinguishing that those theories harm people of color oppressed by conceptions of race that describe the strategies of assignment rather than challenge the

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander Weheliye, “Racism: Biopolitics,” in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assmeblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 59.

ideology itself that “race” even exists. He criticizes Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben for advocating theories of race rooted exclusively in the Holocaust and unimaginative of racial ideologies which they manifested outside of the European continent and particularly as products of European colonialism. He writes, “There is indeed a task to be done of making the space in question precise, saying where a certain process stops, what are the limits beyond which one could say ‘something different happens.’”¹⁶⁶

Agamben’s theory of bare life is based off *the Muselmann*, captives in Nazi concentration camps who appeared resigned to impending death, lacking in life. To Agamben, the Muselmann is the evidence to an argument of the most basic “human biological matter.”¹⁶⁷ Weheliye accentuates that theories of race such as “bare life,” which fail to reject a legitimate *basis* of race, and therefore actually *recreate* race. Weheliye writes, “Far from exceeding race [...] the Muselmann represents an intense and excessive instantiations thereof, penetrating every crevice of political racialization; how else to explain the very name Muselmann, a racial slur for Muslims.”¹⁶⁸ The ultimate question posed by Weheliye concerns, given

the overall pervasiveness of biopolitics in Europe, why must its most severe incarnation bear the heavy burden of paradigmatic exemplariness, just as it does in Agamben? Why not simply examine the biopolitics of Nazi racism qua Nazi racism? Why must this form of racism necessarily figure as the apex in the telos of modern racializing assemblages?

¹⁶⁹

The theory that Weheliye offers to describe the treatment of the Holocaust in collective memory not simply as the top of some hierarchy of oppression, but as truly harmful to peoples of color, is *Holocaust exemplariness*. Further defined, *Holocaust exemplariness* is the treatment of

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

the Holocaust in Western scholarship as an exemplary event—unprecedented, unfathomable, exceptional; the “active disremembering” of slavery and colonialism by scholars, the result of which creates the Holocaust as “a completely unique event in its ethical and biopolitical radicality.”¹⁷⁰ Weheliye argues that such an emphasis on Holocaust narratives obscures divergent historical realities, supplanting histories of racism enacted against peoples of color both before, and enduring after the Holocaust. By maintaining the Holocaust and its victims as “the apex in the telos of modern racializing assemblages,” Holocaust exemplariness purports the “systematic neglect of race and coloniality.”¹⁷¹ Further, it positions “all interpretations of race, ethnicity, and racism that are not immediately tied to Nazism ... [as] crude, simplistic, prehistoric, and undeserving of sustained critical attention.”¹⁷²

Weheliye criticizes *Holocaust exemplariness*, but he also makes clear that he does not intend to argue for the supersession of Holocaust narratives with those of slavery, racism, or indigenous genocide; rather, he asserts that the distinction between the different contexts must be acknowledged, that studies of race exclusively concerned with the Holocaust are not encompassing or inclusive.

*The point to be made here does not concern replacing the camp with the plantation as the nomos and hidden matrix of current politics but that it is necessary to think through the commonalities and disparities between these two spaces without awakening the demon of comparison.*¹⁷³

It is impossible to say either one of these scholars, Weheliye or Rothberg, is more correct than the other because the answer depends on where one looks. *Holocaust exemplariness* has two major implications, as we can understand them. First, is the widespread exclusion, erasure and

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 60, 64.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 72.

devaluing of the histories of oppression against people of color in the name of maintaining a hierarchy of oppression with the Holocaust on top. This framing is harmful to students of color because it prevents them from the opportunities to learn about their own histories and reconcile their experiences in the U. S. within the contingency of a systematically oppressive history. The second is that when the Holocaust takes precedence in the collective memory, it reproduces those same exclusions for Jews whose heritage is not from Europe, whose families faced violence and oppression but not in the Holocaust. By projecting an imagination of *Holocaust exemplariness*, not only are all histories of oppression not tied to the *geographic* confines of Europe delegitimized in the canon, but so too are all *Jewish people* not from the European region. To account for this double edge of *Holocaust exemplariness*, I offer the term *Ashkenazi exemplariness*: the conceptions of Holocaust memory and rhetoric that simultaneously delegitimize *people of color* histories from inclusion in canon and *Jews of color* histories from the canon. This term also augments that conflating the whole of Jewish identity, or the whole of World/American/Israeli Jewry, with *Holocaust exemplariness* is itself *Ashkenazi exemplariness*.

Ashkenazi Exemplariness and the Holocaust

Scholarship on the assimilation of American Jews into Whiteness often confines itself strictly to the bounds of Europe. While Jewish communities have existed for millennia across the globe—in North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, India, among elsewhere—it is only those Jews of Ashkenazi descent, that is, Jews predominantly from Eastern or Western Europe, who dominate constructions of Jewish identity in the modern-day. Dominant discourses on Jewish ethnic and/or racial identity speak of the “mainstream Jew” without feeling the need to clarify to

whom they refer. Lewis Gordon, a professor of Africana philosophy, writes in “Rarely Kosher: Studying Jews of Color in America,” that the term “mainstream Jews” is merely a euphemism for “White Jews.”¹⁷⁴ This misconception prescribes an inaccurate, “homogenous Jewish past” onto all Jews.¹⁷⁵ Gordon, recognizing that “there were once no Jews who were white,” stresses how “this strange development means that large groups of nonwhite Jews simply disappeared, or at least disappeared as Jews.”¹⁷⁶

Census counts are problematic estimates because they themselves are often created by establishment organizations, and therefore rarely design measures that account for the identities of non-Ashkenazi Jews.¹⁷⁷ Outside of the United States, the widespread geographic dispersion of Jews, along with the reality that there are some countries that either do not count religion or where it is unsafe for Jews to report their religion, also complicates attaining an accurate measure.¹⁷⁸ However, the leaders of the *Be’chol Lashon*, an organization that promotes awareness of Jewish racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity and strengthens Jewish identity with outreach programs built on the foundation of these diversities, made an effort to synthesize all available data and provide an educated estimate of the number of Jews of color in the United States. They “estimate at least 20% of the Jewish population is racially and ethnically diverse, including African, African American, Latino (Hispanic), Asian, Native American, Sephardic, Mizrahi and mixed-race Jews by heritage, adoption, and marriage.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Lewis Gordon, "Rarely Kosher: Studying Jews of Color in North America." *American Jewish History* 100, no. 1 (2016): 110. doi:10.1353/ajh.2016.0006.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷⁷ Sometimes they will include Sephardi, too, but this is often as far as measures of “diversity” expand.

¹⁷⁸ “Counting Jews,” *Be’chol Lashon*, n.d., <https://globaljews.org/resources/research/counting-jews/>.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The Ashkenazi Jewish community is most often treated by both non-Jewish and Jewish scholars as *the* authentic Jewish identity. The ideology which conflates Jews with Whiteness is situated within the same sphere as *Holocaust exemplariness*, and it transposes the larger U.S. Black-White racial binary onto the Jewish community by treating European Jews as the dominant and thereby authentic form of Jewishness. This marginalizes non-White Jews and is, as well, a manifestation of *Ashkenazi exemplariness*. The predominance of Jewish Whiteness confounds the historical narrative by erasing all Jewish identities not rooted in Europe; centering European Jewish histories because they fit into the dominant European narrative and excluding lived experiences of non-White Jews around the world.

By way of example, Marra B. Gad, an independent film and television producer with an advanced degree in Modern Jewish history, and also a Jew of color, was invited to present at the 2019 Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Biennial Conference in Chicago.¹⁸⁰ In a public Facebook post released following the conference, she painfully reflected on the racist reactions aimed at her presence during the conference, each intended to delegitimize her authenticity of being a Jew who is Black. When Gad arrived at the reception desk to pick up her presenter badge, she “was told that the ‘REAL’ Marra Gad needed to pick up her badge.”¹⁸¹ Later, while wearing her “very bright orange badge that clearly said PRESENTER across the bottom,” she was twice addressed as if an employee of the hotel. They told her “to do more to get room service orders more quickly.”¹⁸² Gad describes that the other attendees related to her as if she were traversing in a

¹⁸⁰ The URJ was founded in 1873 as the North American edition of a new, Reform practice of Judaism. Today, roughly 850 American congregations are members of the association. “What the URJ Stands For,” *Union for Reform Judaism, n.d.*, <https://urj.org/who-we-are/joining-union>.

¹⁸¹ Marra Gad, “Friends, With Another Shabbat About to Begin,” Facebook post, Dec. 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/marra.gad/posts/1062561097421537>.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

space to which she had no claim. She describes, “I was aggressively asked repeatedly WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? And when I would reply that I was a featured speaker on Shabbat afternoon, I was then asked what I could possibly have to speak about.”¹⁸³ Gad wrote that while the other 5,000 attendees at the conference sat at dinner, danced in song sessions or joined together in Shabbat prayer, “I was in my hotel room alone. Crying. Because I did not feel comfortable and safe being out with my own people.”

Struggling with an explanation for her experience, Gad consulted two friends, both rabbis. She describes that she realized from these conversations “that most people really don’t understand what the experiences at Biennial felt like for me. Because they cannot. Because it would not happen to them. Because they are white. And I am not. And for a moment, that made sense.”¹⁸⁴ Gad emphasized that her frustrations emanated exactly from her belief that Jews, who know what antisemitism feels like, should know better than to exclude within their own community based on race. “I would offer,” she writes, “that Jews should absolutely understand because of what it feels like to be on the receiving end of anti-semitism.”¹⁸⁵

Establishment Jewish spaces in the United States are overwhelmingly insensitive to the diversity of ethnic identity across the whole of World Jewry. Contemplating why this is the case requires exploring Jewish ethnic, cultural and racial identity within the U.S., and particularly within a modern world plagued by the ideological traditions associated with European colonization. It is important that there *is* resistance to *Ashkenazi exemplariness* within the American Jewish establishment and from American Jews dissociated from that establishment. While it may have been difficult to locate such resistance in the establishment even ten years

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

ago, there are now intentional programs to promote inclusivity and diversity awareness.¹⁸⁶ Yet, even the claim that the deconstruction of Ashkenazi dominance did not occur until recently must acknowledge that resistance is not new; though perhaps now growing much more widespread. In 1992, Stan Beiner, a Jewish educator and author of student curricula¹⁸⁷ wrote, “When children are taught only one set of customs, it is natural for them to assume that is the ‘right’ or superior way of doing things [and] will also feel alienated from a curriculum which presumes all Jews are of White Ashkenazic background.”¹⁸⁸ That was 1992.

Karen Brodtkin, in her book *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race In America* (1998), offers an explanation of Jewish assimilation as derived from the complex negotiation between ethnoracial assignment and ethnoracial identity. She defines ethnoracial “assignment” as prescribed by a dominant group (through policy, economics, and so forth), and ethnoracial “identity” as self/group-constructed (based in history, culture, religion, and such). The two are both “conceptually distinct [and] also deeply interrelated.”¹⁸⁹ That Jews in the U.S. with origins in western or eastern Europe identify with “Otherness” and simultaneously emulate “Whiteness” is a product of how racial ideologies and constructions have evolved in the U.S. context; the tensions involved in these ethnoracial transformations, and the result—grappling with a struggle to reconcile place and purpose of identity within the prescribed assignment.

¹⁸⁶ Maya Mirsky, “Jewish Organizations Playing Catch-Up to Racially Diverse Community,” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, Aug. 10, 2018,

<https://www.jweekly.com/2018/08/10/jewish-organizations-playing-catch-up-to-racially-diverse-community/>

¹⁸⁷ See his book, *Sedra Scenes: Skits for Every Torah Portion* (New Jersey: Behrman House, 2002).

¹⁸⁸ Stan Beiner, “Multicultural Education: Is There More to Sephardaica Than Sufganiyot?” *Jewish Education News* (Summer 1992), 28-29.

¹⁸⁹ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 3.

Under Brodtkin's rubric, ethnoracial belongingness and otherness are determined by the White majority and transcribed on immigrant communities in direct opposition to "Blackness." Brodtkin analyses how in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even skilled workers who immigrated to the United States could only find employment in working-class jobs. She cites the G.I. Bill in 1944 as a discernible moment in which European Jews, and other soon-to-be incorporated White ethnic groups, gained new access into the institutions of Whiteness—schools, house ownership, and so forth. The reason behind the G. I. Bills as a moment of assimilation is not because the bill itself provided access to economic success, which it did, but that these resources were discriminatorily privileged to veterans of sub-White ethnic groups and restricted for Black veterans. In a society structured on "an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-a-vis blackness," Jews were granted a property in Whiteness; a "racial middleness: of an experience of marginality vis-a-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-a-vis blackness."¹⁹⁰ The access itself is not what brought these Jews into Whiteness, but rather that the access was granted as a "privilege" excluded from Black veterans.

Brodtkin does not make distinctions between "American Jews" or "European Jews," nor does she hypothesize beyond the European/White narrative. If she does, it is not clearly identifiable. However, Brodtkin writes, inspired by her own family, from a conception of a particular Jewish geography in New York, the historic epicenter of Ashkenazi Jewish immigration to the United States. In 1824, there were an estimated 6,000 estimated living in the United States; by 1848, this number had risen to 50,000; by 1914, the Jewish population in the

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

United States was over 1.3 million, with estimates upwards of 3 million.¹⁹¹ Especially after World War II, and especially in New York, the persecuted Jews of Europe were now a Jewish majority in the U.S. With the United States asserted to international dominance, so too were Ashkenazi, American Jews made into a dominant of World Jewry.

Those who resist *Holocaust exemplariness* on the grounds that it delegitimizes people of color histories from the canon may find particularly interesting that *Ashkenazi exemplariness* imposes a delegitimization of the histories of Jews whose heritage remained outside the reach of the Third Reich. It should be clarified that the Holocaust reached into communities outside of Europe—into North Africa, Greece, among certain others—and was not confined entirely by the labels Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi or otherwise. But the consciousness-raising that happened in the later years of the war, once the Nazi's systematic extermination of Jews was brought to light—belatedly¹⁹²—left an imprint on World Jewry just as much as the Holocaust did itself.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Samson Oppenheim, "The Jewish Population of the United State," *The American Jewish Year Book* 20 (Springer: American Jewish Committee, September 7, 1918, to September 24, 1919/5679), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23600990>.

¹⁹² It is more often told that President Roosevelt received advanced information of the Holocaust that he chose not to share. In an important addition to this memory, during the years World War II, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the Jewish publisher of *The New York Times*, refrained from publishing clear evidence he received of the Nazi Holocaust, downplaying the violence on purpose in fear that printing any opposition to Hitler in the U.S. "society that was still widely anti-Semitic" would be misread "as a merely parochial cause," and avoided at great lengths any branding of *The Times* as a "Jewish newspaper." Sulzberger's Jewish identity and the fear of antisemitism was the antithesis of that stereotypical innuendo that says Jews control of the media as he literally hid the Holocaust in fear of antisemitic retribution. (Max Frankel, "150th Anniversary: 1851-2001; Turning Away From the Holocaust," *The New York Times*, Nov. 14, 2001.)

¹⁹³ It also seems that, in the Middle East, following the establishment of the State of Israel there became a distinct Israeli identity versus Arab identity. The JIMENA letter regarding the ESMC clearly believes Jewish groups from the Middle East and North Africa belong within any discussion of Arab identity, but group of Mizrahi Jews living in Israel were asked the question, "Do you get offended if you are called an Arab?" and their overwhelming response was: "I'm not offended, but I'm not Arab." Only one respondent mentioned growing up in a coexisting Jewish-Palestinian neighborhood in Israel, contending: "I was born in an area where Arabic people and Jewish people live together [...] and from my life experience we are the same, you know? We are Jewish, they are Arabic, it's true that we came from different places [...] but today we influence each other. So I'm not offended, we're all one." Many Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews who fled to the United States did not remain in Israel-Palestine long enough to integrate this distinction into their ancestral identity. (Corey Gil-Shuster, "Mizrahim/Arab Jews: Do You Get Offended When Someone Calls You Arabs?" VIdo, 4:51. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAakeI0ftIg>)

At the same time, with parents, grandparents and great-grandparents who immigrated from Europe, individuals who fled from the primary diasporic community devastated by the Holocaust, in the United States, the trauma was discussed only in private. In one's family memory, for those Jewish families who emigrated from Europe years prior, there might have been two possible effects: either one knew that family still lived in Europe during WWII and mourned the personal trauma of that destruction; or, one did not know of any family still living in Europe, and children and grandchildren of those families mourned, in the most quintessentially Jewish way, the guilt of surviving.

The incorporation of certain Jews into Whiteness and the evolution of those group members into the "authentic" Jewish identity is rooted, ironically, in the Holocaust. John Stratton, a leading scholar of cultural studies, argues that the time when European immigration to North America was at its highest was also when a new distinction in the Black-White racial binary became clarified.¹⁹⁴ As European immigration increased in Western settler-colonial nations, the dominant Whiteness was tasked with determining where each immigrant community fit in that binary. Now a thoroughly systemized hierarchy, there became a distinction between "ethnicity" and "race." Stratton argues,

*those groups designated as ethnic [could] be represented within the ultimately unified, if not homogenous, nation-state, those designated as racially Different [were] considered not to be representable [...] Indeed, any attempt to represent them either nationally (that is, in cultural terms) or as part of the state (that is, in political terms) [would] threaten the integrity and existence of the nation-state.*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Jon Stratton, "The Impossible Ethnic: Jews and Multiculturalism in Australia," *Diaspora Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no.3 (1996): 339-373.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 355.

The differences between ethnicity and race, necessary for the perpetuation of a racial binary, took “race” to mean a geographic, biologically distinct characterization, and ethnicity a national origin, culturally distinct and therefore able to assimilate. According to Stratton, in this era (notably before 1948), Jewish immigrants arriving in Western nations shared no one nationality (did not all come from a singular nation-state) and no one language¹⁹⁶—important parameters for the title of “ethnic.” In other words, World Jewry had “no ‘origin,’ nothing that anchor[ed] the representation of a Jewish ethnic identity.”¹⁹⁷

What ultimately occurred, in Stratton’s belief, is the White majority found a place for Ashkenazi Jews within Whiteness in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, wherein the Holocaust itself became the Jewish national origin. The Holocaust became the site of “the invention of a Jewish-European identity,” “a secular and European origin,” that allowed for the assimilation of many European Jews into European Whiteness (outside of Europe, that is).¹⁹⁸ This result was as equally based on a Black-White binary as it was on Enlightenment complicity in the intellectualism that led to the Holocaust. Stratton formulates, “The Holocaust is positioned as the final consequence of Enlightenment secularization and the triumph of means-ends rationality. Post-Holocaust Jews become a living, moral reminder of the final loss of modern innocence.”¹⁹⁹ Therein, the Holocaust was conceived as the end result of Enlightenment-era scientific racial ideology and intellectualism, developed so particularly by Europeans, and the incorporation of Ashkenazi Jews into Whiteness the reparation. Furthermore, that the Holocaust occurred geographically within the borders of Europe, regardless that victims themselves existed

¹⁹⁶ While Jewish communities across Europe adopted Yiddish as a cultural language, it was not spoken outside of Europe.

¹⁹⁷ Stratton, “The Impossible Ethnic,” 357.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

both within and outside those borders, demanded a recognition of the complicity of all European nation-states, the notion of nationalism itself, in the destruction of European Jewry. Stratton believes the Jewish ethnic identity was created, perversely and painfully, in the ownership of the Holocaust by post-Enlightenment European nationalism.

By ascribing Jewish diaspora a national consciousness in Europe with the Holocaust, Ashkenazi Jews were also made the *legitimate* Jews with the *legitimated* history. The construction of Jewish identity around the Holocaust therein perpetuates the exclusion and invalidation of Mizrahi, Sephardi and Jews of color from “mainstream” Jewish spaces and from the Western psyche’s consciousness of what it looks and means to *be* a Jew. The narrative of Jewish identity rooted entirely in the Holocaust erases the authenticity of Jewishness that is not from Europe; it positions Ashkenazi Jews as the “property” owners of Jewish identity.

Synthesizing both Stratton and Brodtkin, assimilation into Whiteness has been assigned more than self-determined. It seems that the elevation of the Holocaust above histories of colonialism and slavery, which represents the privileging of Holocaust memory over people of color histories, also had the same implication in the Jewish community itself. The European settler ideology transcribed onto World Jewry, especially American Jewry, its own Black-White racial binary. To be descended from Europe, even to be descended from a group so consistently oppressed throughout the entire history of Europe, gave Ashkenazi Jewish identity a stake in the project of Whiteness denied to other Jewish communities.

Looking at the history of Jews in the United States shows consistent evidence that Ashkenazi Jews were allowed access to education and policy creation well before the communities involved in the first Ethnic Studies collegiate programs—Black, Indigenous, Latinx

and Asian communities. By the definitions presented by Kenneth Monteiro's letter, the relative access granted to Ashkenazi Jews from in the creation of policy and canon in collective memory excludes American Jewish inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). In the following chapter, I will discuss Harris' concept of *Whiteness as property* through a historical event widely—though biasedly—remembered as the dissolution of Black-Jewish solidarity. The moment explored in the following chapter, so tied into education policy creation and conflict over power, will lead us to better understanding, through a historical context, how *Ashkenazi exemplariness* may be similarly impacting the current dispute regarding the ESMC.

CHAPTER THREE
**Whiteness as Property:
Ocean Hill-Brownsville and the United Federation of Teachers**

The events of Ocean Hill Brownsville between the years 1967 to 1969 are a jumping point from which to understand the sociological context of the debate over the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), not simply because of the communities involved but because they exemplify the negative outcomes for a community of color forced to fight against leaders of the American Jewish establishment for equitable access in education. In her book, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, 1967-1971* (2001), Jane Anna Gordon analyses the events that can now be accepted retroactively as a birthing point of divide between Ashkenazi Jews and communities of color in the United States over school policy and curriculum.²⁰⁰ The events in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, accentuated an unequal fight under the assumption of equal access.

Gordon has argued against equivalating opposing claims to privilege when one side

²⁰⁰ Jane Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, 1967-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

speaks from a history differently situated than another.²⁰¹ The ESMC and Ocean Hill-Brownsville both suggest that, if a conflict exists between a people of color group on one side, and the American Jewish establishment on the other, then it may likely ensue as a competition over historical memory, wherein threats to *Holocaust exemplariness* become represented as “antisemitism.” I apply Cheryl Harris’ concept of “Whiteness as property” to explore, in this competition to determine power over policy creation, whose identity is legitimized, and by what mechanisms.

In the case of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the position of Jewish teachers and administrators within the conflict over community control accentuated the property claims available with assimilation into Whiteness. How and under what circumstances these Jews attained the privilege of Whiteness is central to analyzing the ESMC, in that battles over education policy power—administrative or curricular—are as much about unequal stakes in economic and academic access as they are about unequal stakes in a historical memory that treats legitimization of one’s history itself as a property of Whiteness.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

The neighborhood of Ocean-Hill Brownsville sits in north-central Brooklyn, New York. One hundred years before the 1968 conflict over school policy control, the area was a hub for European Jewish immigrant laborers.²⁰² Sixty-six percent of the entire neighborhood had not been born in the United States, of whom 80% were Russian immigrants. By 1920, of 100,000 inhabitants in the neighborhood, at least 80,000 were Russian Jews.²⁰³ However, in the late

²⁰¹ Gordon, “The Gift of Double Consciousness.”

²⁰² Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

1960s, when the conflict broke out, the neighborhood of Ocean Hill-Brownsville had transformed into a demographic population of roughly 77% Black and 19% Puerto Rican.²⁰⁴ To put the ensuing conflict into perspective, during the strike, the Chairman of the New York School System estimated that 8% percent of New York City teachers were Black and 1% percent were Puerto Rican; whereas 10% were Italian, 9% were Irish, and 65% were Jewish.²⁰⁵ The same research, counting pupil demographics across New York City, estimated that across all students in the city's schools, 36% were Black, 24% were Puerto Rican, 16% were Jewish, 13% were Italian and 7% were Irish.²⁰⁶ More than 10 years after *Brown vs Board* ruled school segregation illegal, the schools in Ocean Hill Brownsville were still entirely segregated; yet, run almost entirely by White, predominantly Jewish teachers.

The events that began in Ocean Hill-Brownsville did not contain themselves to that district; the entire New York City school system suffered. What transpired was a citywide, multi-day strike that ended and began again three times over the course of two months. On September 9, 1968, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) leadership staged a walkout; ninety-three percent of the city's total 58,000 population of teachers participated. The strike impacted 1.1 million New York students, many of whom attended community-organized make-shift classes at their local religious institutions during school shut-downs.²⁰⁷

The 1968 New York Teachers' strike has been canonized in the historical memory as a battle between Blacks and Jews. First, this narrative erases that a large portion of Ocean Hill-Brownsville's residents was Puerto Rican. Second, it does not bother to re-center the lived

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰⁵ Paul Ritterband, "Ethnic Power and the Public Schools: The New York City School Strike of 1968," *Sociology of Education* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 255.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Pritchett, *Brownsville*.

histories of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community members who, by 1967, had been fighting a ten year battle with the Board of Education to integrate New York schools after the ruling of *Brown v. Board*.²⁰⁸ The significance of the sheer number of Ashkenazi Jewish teachers in predominantly non-White New York City schools is important not necessarily because they were Jewish, but because teachers themselves were fighting for the power communities struggled to gain. The strike became about Jews because the leaders of the UFT and its largest cohort of teachers were Ashkenazi Jews, so their leadership believed that the aims of the community were a threat to teachers' right to work, and were, therefore, able to represent the conflict as a threat directly to Jewish teachers.

Scholars today often confuse the importance of this strike by treating synonymously the concepts of *decentralization* and *community control*.²⁰⁹ In fact, this is the product of purposeful narrative construction. Many scholars write predominantly of the conflict as one between Jews and Blacks, because that is how the media of the time portrayed the conflict.²¹⁰ Conflating decentralization and community control as related ideas prohibits the discovery that it is exactly their differences, and the obscuring of their difference by a discourse about Black-Jewish tension, that erects the conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville separate from the psyche of its historical moment.²¹¹

As a governance policy, *decentralization* proposed the redistribution of powers over school policy creation from the Board of Education down the bureaucratic levels. School policies included the power to fire and hire teachers, administrators, and principals; the allocation of

²⁰⁸ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 16.

²⁰⁹ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 7.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

schools funds; the creation of curricula; among others.²¹² The distinction between decentralization and community control lies in who is at the bottom of the ladder; in the model of decentralization, the bottom level of the ladder, the community for whom the whole bureaucracy exists, is the teachers. Or, in organizational terms, the teachers' union. According to Jane Gordon, "decentralization disperses the loci of authority. The nucleus of power remains with a central Board of Education, but the bureaucracy is broken into field or administrative units, themselves sometimes further divided."²¹³ *Community control*, on the other hand, proposed a reallocation of powers away from the government bureaucracy and into the hands of actual members of the community.²¹⁴ On the bottom of this ladder was the community itself and, thereby, the students.

In response to the ungranted promises of desegregation and ceaseless educational inequity, community members in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, consisting of parents, activists, and clergy, among others, proposed to elect and institute a community governing board through which they would improve the conditions of their schools themselves. Why did community members of Ocean Hill-Brownsville prefer community control over decentralization? According to Gordon,

*Demonstrating that "professionals" have failed to educate these [non-White] children, white liberals, black militants, and a growing number of black moderates have argued—and continue to argue—that "the 'community' ought to be given a chance to succeed, or at least to fail, and on its own terms."*²¹⁵

In January 1967, a cohort of representatives from Ocean Hill-Brownsville met to propose a community control plan to the Board of Education, hoping that combining forces and drafting

²¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the initiative would help their case; they were correct. In February 1967, the Board of Education allocated \$44,000 to a local church to allow for the planning, training and election of community governing board representatives.²¹⁶

The historical memory today will say the strike came out of a conflict defined by antisemitism: by Black Power radicals waging active “Black antisemitism.” The historical memory is just that ideology which initiates into canon the “official knowledge” of historical memory, rather than opposing claims which situate historical memories. The historical memory of today will argue that the strike following the Board of Education’s decision to allow for the creation of a community governing board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville resulted from Black parents who resentfully fired a little over a dozen Jewish teachers and administrators once the community governing board gained control of the district. The UFT argued that community control put their jobs at risk, but, in truth, these teachers were not as much “fired” as they were transferred out of the schools and into the local district office.²¹⁷ After the initiation of the community governing board, a number of UFT leaders and members employed in Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools, who had been opposed to decentralization as much as community control, spoke and acted with open hostility towards the newly hired Black teachers and the community governing board; they were relocated not because of their Jewishness or their Whiteness, specifically but because of their aggressive opposition to community control *within* the community schools.²¹⁸

If based in the most commonly cited and vocally disseminated statements from this conflict, imagination would suggest that Jewish employees feared their job safety under a Black

²¹⁶ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 40.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55

and Puerto Rican community governing board and framed their fears as fears of antisemitism. The conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was discussed in the media and by Union leaders as an uprising of Black Power radicals who “couldn't wait” any longer. The sentiment of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community, as Gordon puts it, was: “Why must the black's ‘turn’ be last?”²¹⁹

We should not accept that opposition was the view of either all New York teachers or all Jewish New York teachers, and not of particularly the UFT. In this light, Gordon's research uncovers exclusions from the historical record that are vital to reconstructing our understanding of the conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Furthermore, she does so while simultaneously making the argument that it was exactly the tactics employed by opponents of community control and the New York City United Federation of Teachers (UFT) that created the narrative we must deconstruct.

A now-famous pamphlet was placed in the mailboxes of a handful (about a dozen) UFT teachers at one of the community board schools. It was published anonymously and many questioned its legitimacy—Jews included—about whether it was not in fact written by the UFT themselves. Albert Shanker, president of the UFT, reprinted five-hundred thousand copies of this statement and disseminated it to the residents of New York City. The statements and the charge of antisemitism took over the media coverage of the teachers' strike and “evidenced” the presence of antisemitism on behalf of the community governing board. According to Jerald Podair, in his book, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville* (2002), “their [the copies] effect on the Jewish community was shattering.” This anonymously written, controversially cited, heavily disputed and strategically widely

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71

disseminated letter read:

*If African American History and Culture is to be taught to our Black Children it Must Be Done by African Americans Who Identify With and Who Understand the Problem. It is Impossible for the Middle East Murderers of Colored People to Possibly Bring to This Important Task the Insight, The Concern, The Exposing of the Truth That is a Must If The Years of Brainwashing and Self-Hatred That Has Been Taught To Our Black Children By These Bloodsucking Exploiters and Murderers Is to Be Overcome . . . Get out, Stay Out, Staff Off, Shut Up, Get Off Our Backs, Or Your Relatives In The Middle East Will Find Themselves Giving Benefits To Raise Money To Help You Get Out From Under The Terrible Weight Of An Enraged Black Community.*²²⁰

According to Podair, “The letter was never linked to any person officially connected to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment, and the district’s replacement teachers, approximately 40 percent of whom were themselves Jewish, issued a statement disavowing anti-Semitism.” Jewish teachers employed in the community schools disputed the claim that the community governing board was antisemitic.²²¹ At the same time, Jewish teachers employed in the districted refuted claims of antisemitism. In fact, when the community governing board began operations and opened their schools, they did so by hiring “350 new teachers, more than 50 percent of whom were white and Jewish.”²²² The White Jewish teachers working in these schools opposed the notion that the community governing board held antisemitic intent. For one case,

*new white Jewish employees at the schools had chosen to be in Ocean Hill-Brownsville in the first place, and, once there, [...] they spoke consistently in defense and support of the project of community control.*²²³

Further, Charles Isaacs, a Jewish teacher in one of the community-run Ocean Hill-Brownsville school, wrote:

²²⁰ Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 124.

²²¹ Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 124.

²²² Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 66.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

*[T]he community governing board have demonstrated again and again that these fears [of anti-Semitism] are unfounded. On the day before Rosh Hashanah, the governing board distributed to all the children in our schools a leaflet explaining the holiday, what it means to Jewish people, and why all the city schools are closed that day. As far as I know, no other school district has taken the trouble to do this.*²²⁴

However, predictably, 500,000 copies of an anonymously-authored letter controlled the media story; and the contemporary memory.

During the strike, Leslie Campbell, a teacher in the district, appeared on Julius Lester's WBAI radio show, *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*.²²⁵ Lester requested Campbell read a poem written by an Ocean Hill-Brownsville student during the time of the school shut-downs. Lester had listened to the poem earlier and believed that to hear such resentment and spite from a child would rattle the striking teachers into recognizing the dire impact of their protests were having on student well-being.²²⁶ The student, Thea Behran, wrote,

*Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head
 You pale-faced Jew boy— I wish you were dead.
 I can see you Jew boy— no you can't hide.
 I got a scoop on you— yeh, you gonna die.
 I'm sick of your stuff
 Every time I turn 'round— you pushin' my ear into the ground
 I'm sick of hearing about your suffering in Germany
 I'm sick about your escape from tyranny;
 I'm sick of seeing in everything you do
 About the murder of six million Jews
 Hitler's reign lasted for only fifteen years
 For that period of time you shed crocodile tears
 My suffering lasted for over 400 years, Jew boy,*

²²⁴ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 82.

²²⁵ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 89

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 89

*And the white man only let me play with his toys
 Jew boy, you took my religion and adopted it for you
 But you know that Black people were the original Hebrews²²⁷
 When the U.N. made Israel a free independent State
 Little four and five-year-old boys threw hand grenades
 They hated the Black Arabs with all their might
 And you, Jew boy, said it was all right
 Then you came to America, land of the free
 And took over the school system to perpetrate white supremacy
 Guess you know, Jew boy, there's only one reason you made it
 You had a clean white face, colorless, and faded
 I hated you Jew boy, because your hangup was the Torah
 And my only hangup was my color.²²⁸*

Searching for the significance of a disseminated narrative that framed “Black antisemitism” within the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community governing board despite numerous, legitimate rebuttals—from both Jewish teachers and non-Jewish community members—Rabbi Meir Kahane may provide an important missing link. Kahane is remembered today for his immigration to Israel, where he enacted aggressively radical and extreme politics. For his time in the United States, however, Kahane’s name is written in the memory of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a militant group that co-opted Black activism into their own term, “Jewish Power,” and claimed a duty to protect American Jews against antisemitism. Kahane's chorus called for the defense of Jews against anti-Semitism at all costs.²²⁹ To put Kahane in context, he was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1932, and by the time of the conflict in Ocean Hill-Brownsville had: learned of the Nazi Holocaust as a child in the United States, followed

²²⁷ Black Hebrews are briefly mentioned in the ESMC; they identify at decedents of ancient Israel, recognizing similarities between the Black experiences in slavery and colonialism and the 400 years slavery of Israelites in ancient Egypt. Within certain sects, there are often instances of anti-Jewish violence, but that does not apply across the movement as a whole.

²²⁸ Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait*, 90.

²²⁹ Meir Kahane, *Never Again!: A Program for Survival* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1971).

with resolute intensity the 1948 Arab-Israel War as an adolescent, and, at the same historical moment, the world's attention on 1967 War in Israel-Palestine. Kahane's ideology promoted propaganda to ascribe specific meaning to the plea: "Never again!"

Kahane's message targeted young American Jews by advocating a vision of Jewish Power (clearly appropriated from Black Power) as the necessary, and holiest, defense against antisemitism. In 1970, the JDL's membership included 15,000 individuals, significantly young Jews. Kahane orchestrated terrorist attacks (many), as well as legitimate protection. Kahane is important to the events of Ocean Hill-Brownsville because it is this conflict which led him to establish the Jewish Defense League. The fact that he introduced militant activism under the premise of defense against antisemitism necessitated *evidence* of antisemitism.

In a personal essay published years after Kahane's assassination, Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg reflects on his early, adolescent relationship with Kahane, their falling out, later reunion in the Soviet Jewry movement, and ultimate divide as Kahane's ideas turned more and more extreme.²³⁰ Greenberg, disappointed to admit it, reflects that Kahane's ideological reached into further extremes in direct response to his audience; he grew more radical the more enthusiasm his supporters showed. Greenberg recounts the following story:

In 1972, when I was teaching at City College of New York, one of my students was arrested by the FBI for placing a bomb in mega-entertainment agent Sol Hurok's office, to punish Hurok for sponsoring a Soviet artist's concert tour in America. The bomb killed a secretary. In my conversations with the student he made clear that he believed he had acted under the inspiration of Meir Kahane and even hinted that my old friend had encouraged the bombing, though the FBI never proved anything. When, during an encounter with Kahane, I accused him of possible responsibility for the secretary's death, he argued that "never again" meant "never again at all costs" — including the use of

²³⁰ Irving Greenberg, "(Orthodox)X-Men, On Screen and Off," *The Forward*, Jan. 13, 2003, <https://forward.com/opinion/7470/orthodox-x-men-on-screen-and-off/>.

force and violence.

We met again years later, for yet another debate. Kahane had made inroads [...] by cloaking his proposals for elimination of the Arabs with rabbinic sources. Rabbi Avi Weiss, who was a friend of both of ours, came to me and asked if I would debate Kahane. I felt that his ideology and incorrect use of rabbinic sources needed to be challenged — he was a bad influence on [Jewish] students. So I agreed to debate him [...] The week before the debate, an interview with Kahane appeared in the Baltimore Jewish Times. The report was horrific. [Kahane] called for the transfer of the Arab population of the West Bank. As I recall it, he spoke of bringing trucks and rounding up the population—men, women and children--and depositing them in Jordan. When asked by the reporter what would happen if they refused to go, Kahane replied: “We will shoot them if they resist.”

On the night of the debate, I opened by reading back to him his horrible words, adding that I hoped they were journalistic misrepresentations. He responded almost mockingly that he stood behind the words, and that only bleeding heart liberals would object. As he spoke, his young, emotionally childish supporters cheered and applauded wildly, arousing him to further excess.

Shocked and appalled, I reminded him that these words read like a script out of the Holocaust. He topped off with an invocation of his version of Jewish power in the light of the Holocaust to frenzied cheers from his clique. As I said at the time, I wanted to tear my clothes, like a mourner, upon hearing such an immoral, evil policy offered by a Jewish leader in the name of the Holocaust.²³¹

Greenberg saw Kahane's message stirring violence and hate in his otherwise compassionate and thoughtful students, and he was pained both the manipulation of Jewish religious thought into militarism and by Kahane's doing so in the name of the Holocaust.

Kahane was neither representative nor inclusive of all American Jews, but his message made itself clear even to those who disagreed with his methods. In 1970, population counts estimate between five and six million Jews living in the United States. Following the war in 1967, during which World Jewry watched avidly in legitimate fear the Jewish state was about to

²³¹ Irving Greenberg, “(Orthodox)X-Men, On Screen and Off.”

disappear, Kahane was able to turn the perception of antisemitism into the exact evidence for Israeli military force and vigilantism. His ideology was founded on “Revisionist Zionism,” and the politics he associated with that ideology persist in the State of Israel as the Koch Party today. In Kahane’s Jewish Power/Revisionist Zionism, the demand for colonialism and occupation in Israel-Palestine was prefaced upon an indisputable threat posed to the destruction of World Jewry should antisemitism succeed in the creation of another Holocaust.

Six Days and a Teachers’ Strike: The Reinvention of Antisemitism and the Dissolution of Solidarity

Kahane’s ideology, not just of Zionism, but of the specific relationship between Zionism and antisemitism departed drastically from the first Zionists thinkers. In the infancy of the modern Zionist movement, the big thinkers, the originators of the idea, were overwhelmingly Marxists and socialists. They recognized the inherent moral implications that any movement of mass Jewish resettlement necessarily would entail. They reckoned with the issue of return to Zion through the lens of escaping persecution, which is important to understanding that the mass exile of Palestinian refugees as it exists today was not foreseen. As Theodor Herzl wrote in *The Jewish State*,

The Jewish question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not persecuted, and there our presence produces persecution. This

*is the case in every country, and will remain so, even in those highly civilized—for instance, France—until the Jewish question finds a solution on a political basis.*²³²

Herzl's belief was that the establishment of a sovereign Jewish nation would be the ultimate escape from antisemitism.²³³

In its infancy, Zionism, the political movement, was understood as the end to antisemitism through the attainment of autonomous nationhood and reunification of diaspora Jewry; the escape from subjection to the whim of a majority; the end of perpetual exile. When Herzl called the First Zionist Congress to meet in 1897, it was during a moment of growing European nationalism and the rise of nation-state power. Observing World Jewry, looking at their persecution in Europe, North Africa, Latin America, everywhere in the diaspora, Herzl believed he had discovered *the* answer to the “Jewish Problem.”

Revisionist Zionism, as Kahane practiced, redefined Herzl's conception of antisemitism and Zionism. Kahane did not invent Revisionist Zionism, however, which is important. Vladimir Jabotinsky, in the 1920s and 1930s, refuted the dominant belief that Zionism could succeed purely with the support of Western nations, and not with active, fast-tracked settler-population increases. In 1926, Jabotinsky declared,

*The first aim of Zionism is the creation of a Jewish majority on both sides of the Jordan River. This is not the ultimate goal of the Zionist movement, which aspires to more far-reaching ideals, such as the solution of the question of Jewish suffering throughout the entire world and the creation of a Jewish culture. The precondition for the attainment of these noble aims, however, is a country in which the Jews constitute a majority.*²³⁴

²³² Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896).

²³³ Similarly, David Ben Gurion, expanded on his conscious decision to broadcast the Eichmann trial in a manner that would portray the Holocaust as unparalleled, wrote in a letter: “Anti-Semitism is caused by the existence of the Jews in Exile [...] When they are different from their neighbors they awaken fear or derision, and when they try to me like them, and as usual become more Catholic than the pope, they are repulsed.” (Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

²³⁴ Vladimir Jabotinsky, “What the Zionist-Revisionists Want,” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 462.

By Revisionism, Jabotinsky envisioned that the only way to succeed in establishing an autonomous Jewish nation required the work of expansion and increased immigration. He did not, however, at the time of this statement, envision that the Jewish state would expel all non-Jews from Palestine. He accentuated: “Our attitude toward the Palestinian Arabs is determined by the full recognition of an objective fact: even after the formation of a Jewish majority a considerable Arab population will always remain in Palestine.”²³⁵ It will be further discussed in the following chapter how increasing the Jewish population in Palestine did not necessarily found itself upon the premise of destroying Arab Palestinian presence. Perhaps it was because the significance of the 1967 (“Six Day”) war in a Jewish state re-invigorated the memory of persecution, but Kahane took from Jabotinsky’s Revisionist Zionism the idea of a Jewish responsibility to fight for one’s own Jewish liberation; he then transposed self-advocacy onto the ideology of militant Jewish Power.

Kahane describes the militancy of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) as “Jews who prefer peace but who will now fight and win.”²³⁶ Not too long after the era of entanglement between Holocaust memory and Zionism, produced in part, as mentioned, in the 1961 Eichmann trial, the 1967 War in Israel-Palestine convinced many Jews across the world they were about to watch the total destruction of all Jews in Israel-Palestine. When the Israeli Defense Forces defended against a surprise attack by combined Arab armies and won within six days, the significance of a Jewish nation as both the *escape* from antisemitism and the *victim* of antisemitism created emotions more powerful than just rhetoric. The success of the Israeli military invigorated Kahane’s resolve for “Jewish Power” militancy with a conviction that the American Jewish

²³⁵ Jabotinsky, “What the Zionist-Revisionists Want,” 464.

²³⁶ Meir Kahane, *Never Again!*, vi.

community needed the same militant protection as did the Israeli Jews.

With Kahane and Revisionist Zionism, the State of Israel (the material gain of Zionism) was no longer the *end* to antisemitism, but the *evidence* of antisemitism, with Zionists the simultaneous *victims of* and *defenders against* Jewish hatred. Kahane writes,

We, the generation of the Holocaust, that stupefying tragedy that was the climax to centuries of beatings, pogroms, and degradation, have witness a revival of Jewish pride and self-respect. We behold an awakening of Jewish identity. Above all, we see a different Jew arising from the ashes and decay of Auschwitz. It is a Jew who pauses to look the world in the eye; to stare directly at those who, for centuries, burned and stabbed and drowned and hanged and gassed us; to softly say: Up against the wall, world.²³⁷

While before 1967 the State of Israel had been understood by many Jews as part of, but not central to, World Jewry, in the aftermath of the 1967 War in Israel-Palestine, the narrative of the “Six-Day War” created a breeding ground for rallying support of American Jews for the Zionist cause. The State of Israel was framed as the only safe haven from antisemitism, a “Jewish lifeboat,” if you will. Many American Jews, and particularly the American Jewish establishment, now cared about the nation’s survival far more than it had before. No longer placing the Jewish state on the periphery of diasporic identity, Israel became less of a distant relative. In the memory of the Holocaust, in the aftermath of a war, the State of Israel felt much closer.

The New York Teachers’ strike and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, even if constructed fallaciously, held immense implications to the situated relationship between American Jews to Zionism and Ashkenazi Jews to communities of color. In Brooklyn, Rabbi Kahane grasped at the new ideological interpretation of Zionism that conflated Holocaust memory with the State of

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

Israel and tied the two together through militance against antisemitism (whether legitimate or constructed). This historical context is not meant to excuse the violence enacted physically, emotionally or legislatively against members of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community; what it should do is emphasize how the particular moment in history was situated amidst the canonization of Holocaust memory—"property" in the collective memory—at the same time it was being transformed into the fear of history repeating itself—a redefinition of the relationship between Zionism and antisemitism more present today. In this situated, tense, fearful moment, even American Jews who adamantly opposed Kahane (as most did) were forced to hear his message. Living as a Jew in Brooklyn, especially because the JDL was *founded* in that neighborhood, there arose the particular stress Jewish Power and Black activism. The voices of Jewish teachers in solidarity with the community governing board were muffled behind a rapidly transforming Jewish establishment perspective on nationhood and enterprise in Zionism, and a radical militancy willing to do the "dirty work of evidencing that perspective.

Amidst these transformations, Ocean Hill-Brownsville was framed as an antisemitic attack that, while it may have felt legitimate, worked mostly because the UFT made their opposition not into a community fighting for equity but into Black Power "radicals." This narrative took advantage of systemic racism and the existing Black-White racial binary in the United States. Solidarity with antisemitism disguised anti-Blackness, privileging the United Federation of Teaching over Black and Puerto Rican students. In a racial hierarchy founded for the explicit purpose of placing Blackness not only at the very bottom but as the ultimate "Other" to which all other identities are constructed, it is important that the battle over community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was characterized as Blacks against Jews. The narrative of Black

Power and antisemitism worked because it emphasized the fears a White majority held towards demands for Black empowerment; for liberation from systemic and institutionalized racism. When the UFT described their opposition as a fear of job safety, they lost solidarity with Black community members because their arguments were based on a property claim of Whiteness concerning the maintenance of economic and educational systems structured against Black people.

Jewish solidarity and Jewish access to power are complicated by the reality that a White Jew can recognize their privilege while never truly losing the memory of a history that evidences the impossibility of permanent Jewish assimilation; the belief that the majority will always, eventually, take back the privileges they grant. Karen Brodtkin's term "racial middleness," here, captures the positionality of Ashkenazi Jews in the United States in which many fear an experience of situational Whiteness, of conditional assimilation.²³⁸ There is, however, an even more daunting Jewish "middleness"—not entirely unrelated. As to be assigned Whiteness is to be assigned privilege, the White Jew in America, in order to legitimate their solidarity with communities of color against the project of Whiteness, must denounce all forms of colonialism, including Zionism. This is a denunciation of the legitimacy of Zionism based on the position that the creation of a Jewish state, as it was born in the British Mandate of Palestine, is itself emblematic of a "property" in Whiteness, which must be objected. To impose this interpretation of Zionism on the judgment of Jewish authenticity to solidarity, however, is to impose an abbreviated definition of "Zionism," a concept which has existed for thousands of years. To denounce the current policies of the State of Israel on the grounds of occupation is often

²³⁸ Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*.

accompanied by the requirement to delegitimize Zionism as a colonial project. Because this secular-academic definition of Zionism does not encompass the inherited meaning of Zionism in Judaism, when a Jewish student, scholar or community member is expected to delegitimize all colonialism, and that includes Zionism, they must negotiate with Zionism in a particular way. A lover of their Judaism who aware of a phenomenon that existed in Jewish tradition well before the modern State of Israel and far before the era of colonialism, is unable to delegitimize the idea of a Jewish return to Jerusalem. That notion too central to historic Jewish texts and prayer books. Therefore, the liberal Jew negotiated themselves to the contention: I do not believe that we *need* a homeland; Jews are a people of exile; the Jewish community was more moral in the diaspora. From these thoughts, I will introduce the following chapter.

Zionism is, perhaps, the most quintessential case study of Jewish “racial middleness.” The following chapter explores why “Zionism” holds a different meaning across different community histories, and how the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum’s (ESMC) simultaneous inclusion of BDS and Israel-Palestine and exclusion of Jewish studies characterizes the ongoing dissolution of solidarity. Additionally, in a show of moments in which American Jewry has been in true solidarity with communities of color, the following chapter challenges the assumption that Jewish Studies has never been a part of Ethnic Studies by offering insight into moments when this was far from the reality.

CHAPTER FOUR

Colonialism and Palestine: Boycotting the Zionist

Is it possible for two peoples to be indigenous to the same land? On what timeline is indigeneity measured? I do not propose to answer these questions; far be it my ability to do so. I center these questions because competing claims to indigeneity, to the most authentic form of nativeness, are, at the ideological level, the foundation of the conflict in Israel-Palestine. Allyship with indigenous peoples against colonialism is an expectation for solidarity in the progressive spaces of contemporary Western academia, including in the United States; as it should be. I do not intend in any way to minimize the lived experiences of Palestinians in diaspora, refugee camps, occupied territories, or as citizens of Israel; the violence of modern colonialism in Israel-Palestine and the inherited and persisting trauma it has created is not acceptable. What I mean to do here, rather, is highlight the peculiarity of the Zionist colonialization of Israel-Palestine, because the fact that proponents on either side of the conflict must delegitimize the other's claims to nativeness is distinct in itself from the rubric by which we define all other colonialism. While what I propose in this chapter may be mistakenly read as a minimization of the aspects of modern political Zionism that *do* conform to colonialism, the aim is to provide background as to why the differentiation between "Zionism" and "political Zionism" does an immense injustice to American Jews by mandating they denounce both forms of Zionism in evidence of authentic solidarity.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the tactics and strategies employed in the

competition over the narrative construction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This chapter illustrates two important implications of the current debate over Jewish exclusion from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), each related in some manner to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and the topics of Zionism and antisemitism. First are the depths of intricacy required to adequately teach critical thinking regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and to do so while conscious to the needs of both Jewish and Palestinians students. Second is that the qualifier of solidarity for Jewish faculty and students in progressive academic spaces demands a denunciation of Zionism, a term which itself holds a distinct meaning for Jews. In the conclusion, I will further these analyses to illustrate how the relationship of liberal American academic spaces to Zionism, which conceives Zionism as a colonial and White Supremacist enterprise, demands of liberal Jews a peculiar denunciation of a Zionism understood through the phenomenon's millennia-long history in Jewish intellectual, religious and cultural heritage. To achieve solidarity by the terms presented within the liberal academy, these Jews must often frame their rejection not against the *right* of a Jewish state to exist, but against the *need* of a Jewish state to exist.

Making the Memory

Many scholars agree that the modern State of Israel and the United States have systematically delegitimized Palestinian claims to the right of return by erasing their indigeneity from the historical record. These scholars, both Jewish and non-Jewish, recognize the enterprise and strategy of Zionist narrative construction. As Jane Gordon reflects, "there are problems with

how Israel gets talked about but [...] they're symptomatic of the non-discussion that happens.”²³⁹

To provide a personal example, as a student in Jewish day school, I heard the word “occupation” only in passing, and no teacher I asked willed me any substantial explanation. If at any point I pressed, “What is the occupation?” they responded, “The occupation isn’t real; Palestinians don’t exist.”

In 2017, I enrolled in an undergraduate course about Palestinian ethnographic history. Walking into that classroom—voluntarily and definitely unprepared—was the most important choice I made as a student, a human being, and a Jew. I cried in that course; I resented my community in that course; and I learned in that course. It provided me with answers to every question I had posed in day school to which I received no adequate explanation. Palestine was *literally* the gap in my education. When my teachers said “Palestinians do not exist,” they did not actually mean that people who *call* themselves Palestinian do not exist (though this is, understandably, how I heard them); rather, that the idea of a Palestinian national consciousness, of a collective group of people called Palestinians, was historical revisionism. They premised that there was never an independent nation of Palestine and thereby never a united group of people who could call themselves, as an entity, Palestinians. In itself, their answer exemplifies a disputed property claim in historical memory, a prioritization of the Jewish nation over the Palestinian nation unequally allocated, not a legitimate answer.

Here is another example: Sitting in the front row of a bus while chaperoning a Jewish youth group weekend retreat, I listened as the high school student behind me gushed to his companion about the four-month semester he’d just spent on an academic program in the State of

²³⁹ Interview with Jane Anna Gordon, Jan. 14, 2020.

Israel. I was the only chaperone on the bus and I struggled with how I could acceptably join the conversation. Three years prior, I had participated in the same program; I decided that was a good enough excuse to join. We began talking conversationally, surface-level. Eventually, I asked him if, while abroad, he had encountered any information about the occupation. He responded, tellingly: “What’s the occupation?”

To have spent four months in the State of Israel and remain unaware of the military reality plaguing Israeli society confirmed to me much of the hesitancy I held growing up in establishment Jewish institutions. I, too, had come back from that program knowing nothing more of the contentious realities than when I left, despite relentless asking and prodding; unable to escape the grasp of Zionist propaganda enough to approach the conflict through any other lens and unable to situate why marginalized peoples around the world were drawn to critiques of Zionism that linked to their own lived oppressions.

Thomas Philip Abowd, a cultural anthropologist, argues in *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012* (2016), that the modern State of Israel is not simply a historical memory of colonization, but actually a current, *living* geography of colonialism.²⁴⁰ He posits,

*the Jewish state’s attempts to sustain sole control over Jerusalem have been as much about guarding the past as they have about fortressing the contemporary city with separation walls, checkpoints, and military emplacements [...] the frontiers that have dominated and defined Jerusalem have included not simply serpentine ramparts of concrete or electrified fences, but also the ossified boundaries of the imagination and the fortified divides of the mind [...] this urban space [Jerusalem] represents not simply a severely divided place within a broader national struggle but also a colonized space at the heart of a colonial conflict.*²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Thomas Philip Abowd, *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity Difference in a City of Myth, 1948-2012* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Narratives and historical memory are constructed to preserve and perpetuate certain knowledge; in post-colonial and colonial contexts, representation in that knowledge is privileged under the assumption of “objectivity.” In an ethnography researched around the time of the Second Intifada, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production & Palestinian Politics* (2013), Amahl Bishara explores how tactics employed by the Western media obscure the participation of Palestinian journalists by claiming their voices are not neutral, and therefore unworthy of dissemination in “neutral” news media.²⁴² In practical terms, Palestinian journalists are denied the right to disseminate their own perspectives. Bishara uses the term “balanced objectivity” to characterize the ideology of Western news media that purports to produce perspectives lacking in bias, fully “neutral,” and with assumed “objectivity.” This ideology places objectivity above subjectivity without recognizing that objectivity, the failure to choose a side, is itself choosing the side of the oppressor.

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement intentionally responds to this unequal portioning of “property” in historical memory. BDS counteracts the obscurity of the humanitarian urgency to support Palestinians by advocating a purposeful counter-narrative. Initially conceived after the Second Intifada began in 2000, in 2005 the movement really became as it is now, following the issuing of a letter signed by dozens of global Palestinian organizations. BDS calls on the international community to divest, sanction and boycott the State of Israel; in doing so it re-centers the Palestinian diaspora, disproportional citizenship rights, and the Israeli military occupation.

²⁴² Amahl Bishara, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production & Palestinian Politics* (United States: Patt Simmons, 2016).

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement

The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) advocates strong support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. The draft curriculum mentions BDS five times, Palestinian(s) twenty-one times, Israel-Palestine or Israel/Palestine twice, and the word “Jew” (never “Jewish” or “Judaism”) four times.²⁴³ Twice the word “Jew” is used in examples of stereotypes enacted against Arabs (that Palestinians want to “drive the Jews into the sea” or Arab men “hate Jews”),²⁴⁴ one time within a course text (*A Patriot’s History to the United States*) to denote a character's identity (in a narrative of “corruption”),²⁴⁵ and a final time as a vague reference to immigrants who “often identified as members of a particular religious.”²⁴⁶ On their website, the BDS movement defines itself as,

*A Palestinian lead movement for freedom, justice and equality that upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity. Israel is occupying and colonizing Palestinian land, discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel and denying Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homes. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, the BDS call urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law. BDS is now a vibrant global movement made up of unions academic associations churches and grassroots movements across the world.*²⁴⁷

BDS calls for a boycott of Israeli cultural, sporting and academic institutions, structures which support “Israel’s apartheid regime.” The boycott of Israeli cultural institutions often takes over the media when celebrities cancel concerts in Tel Aviv after learning about BDS, or post apologies after criticisms of their vacationing in Israel-Palestine. BDS also calls for banks,

²⁴³ Instructional Quality Commission, “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.”

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁴⁷ “What is BDS?” BDS Movement, accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>.

churches, universities and international centers of economic accumulation to divest financial support from the State of Israel and all Israeli international companies. Additionally, BDS presses international governments to impose sanctions by “banning businesses with illegal Israeli settlements, ending military trade and free trade agreements, suspending Israel's membership and international forums such as the UN bodies and FIFA.” BDS describes these sanctions as the “legal obligations” of international governments “to end Israeli apartheid.”²⁴⁸

BDS is, most generally, an advocacy movement to promote recognition of the Palestinian right to return and garner solidarity with the current plight of Palestinian refugees on the international level. The movement centers three indisputable demands:

1. *Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall. International law recognizes the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan Heights as occupied by Israel.*
2. *Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.*
3. *Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.*²⁴⁹

BDS is prefaced on the understanding that true liberation for Palestinians will come only with a return to the land of inheritance. The creation of the State of Israel led to the creation of the Palestinian refugee; to a mass Palestinian exile, so, as Anita De Donato posits, “In the same way as it was produced, the refugee identity can be dismantled.”²⁵⁰ Similarly, reflecting on an interview with a Palestinian freedom fighter in Shatila Refugee Camp, located in Lebanon, Sonia Nimur documents:

Collective memory is the only link to the past of a lost homeland. It is passed to the younger generations in as much detail as possible to protect the children from feeling

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ “FAQs,” BDS Movement, accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/faqs>.

²⁵⁰ Anita De Donato, “Water Politics within the Palestinian Nation-State Building,” *Journal Des Anthropologues* (2013): 172.

*alienated and insecure, and to ensure that the younger generations receive at least part of their inheritance of a land in which they were not born. This homeland stays alive with the next generation, and to them passes the responsibility of its liberation. "I can describe my village in such details as if I have lived there all my life, I can tell you the color of the tree near the mosque, the smell of the flowers in my mother's garden, I can tell you the details of the battles as if I have been there myself."*²⁵¹

The premise upon which BDS claims the State of Israel is carrying on an apartheid regime deserves some discussion. Citing their inspiration in the South African anti-apartheid movement, BDS clarifies: "Israel's regime over the Palestinian people does not depend on similarities between Israeli policies and South Africa under apartheid."²⁵² Comparisons between apartheid in South Africa and the policies in the State of Israel, it seems, should not contradict the allocation of that title to the State of Israel. Given the current military and political practices in Israel-Palestine, this argument has weight. However, despite noting the possibility of distinction from South Africa, it should be made clear that, as a concept, apartheid is the manifestation of a race-based, systematically social, political and economic oppressive structure. Responding to the question, "So is Israel an apartheid state?" columnists of the liberal Jewish media site, *Alma*, describe:

South Africa's apartheid laws disenfranchised non-white South Africans and enforced a regime of comprehensive racial segregation. There's nothing comparable within Israel's borders. While Israel's Arab citizens do suffer from real problems with discrimination and inequality, they have the right to vote, they serve in the Israeli parliament, they work and study in universities alongside Jewish Israelis, and they have achieved great success in fields like medicine, where they are well-represented among Israeli doctors and pharmacists. The situation, though, is very different for Palestinians who live in the West Bank. While a majority of the West Bank's Palestinians live in areas governed by the Palestinian Authority, a majority of the land in the West Bank is under Israeli military rule. Jewish settlers in the West Bank benefit from Israeli citizenship and can travel around more freely, sometimes on roads that were built just to serve them. By contrast,

²⁵¹ Sonia Nimr, "Fast Forward to the Past: A Look into Palestinian Collective Memory," *Cahiers De Litterature Orale*, no. 63 (2008): 338.

²⁵² "Colonialism and Apartheid," BDS Movement. Accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/colonialism-and-apartheid/summary>.

Palestinians can face long waits at Israeli army checkpoints to go from place to place.

In areas of the West Bank under Israeli control, Palestinians live under military rule and Israel controls access to natural resources and whether or not Palestinians can build homes. Some see this situation — in which an Israeli military administration gives rights to Jewish settlers that West Bank Palestinians don't have — as apartheid. But Israel's defenders counter that the situation in the West Bank is not about race, but rather about ensuring security and preventing terrorism, and that these problems would be addressed if there is peace.²⁵³

For the State of Israel to be an apartheid state by traditional definitions, it must write and practice within its laws a race-based oppression. To ask the eternally rhetorical question: Are Jews a race? If Israeli Jews, as a collective, are one race privileged against Palestinians, then the allegation makes clear sense. Yet, greater than half of the total Jewish population in Israel is explicitly *not* White, distinct Jewish communities from diverse global geographies. I mention this here because the connotation of apartheid is also that of White Supremacy, and the notion of the State of Israel is an endeavor of White Supremacy is part of what allows for the total delegitimization of Zionism in progressive academic spaces.

Further, BDS receives the most criticism by the Jewish establishment because it does not actually propose a solution to the territorial conflict in terms of “one state” or “two states,” which leaves a grey area for fear of the practical implications of achieving Palestinian right of return. There is no consensus across all proponents of BDS as to a single solution, as there cannot be expected; there is also no one consensus across all proponents of Zionism. On the official BDS website, the movement offers the following explanation: “The BDS movement does not advocate for a particular solution to the conflict [...] BDS focuses on the realization of basic rights and the

²⁵³ Everything You Need to Know About BDS,” *Alma*. Accessed Jan. 19, 2020, <https://www.heyalma.com/israel-guide/everything-you-need-to-know-about-bds/>.

implementation of international law.”²⁵⁴ These “basic rights” and the “implementation of international law,” refer to the exile of Palestinians in 1948, their right to return, and an end to the illegal Israeli military occupation. Proponents also advocate the destruction of the physical Wall built to segment the land, often called the “Apartheid Wall.”²⁵⁵ This wall is built in a way that separates families, prohibiting movement without specific identification documents, and sustaining hours-long waits and often harassment to pass through checkpoints.

The Wall is both physical and symbolic; as are the other mechanisms of spatial control enacted to foster the diaspora, immobilization, and enclavisation of Palestinians. In her ethnographic research, Anita De Donato recounts that many Palestinian refugees living in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, located in the West Bank, “have traditionally perceived the infrastructure development as a denial of their right of return to their original homes [...] as means of resettling them [...] and [as] normalizing the refugee camp as a proletarian suburb, or a permanent place of exile.”²⁵⁶ Contestation over land began and continues to be the material realization of the conflict in Israel-Palestine. The competing claims to land are fought, however, with competing claims to indigeneity. The United Nations Resolution 194 stipulates the right of return and compensation for loss of property.²⁵⁷

Sometimes the Palestinian right to return is framed as putting an end to the Jewish state.

²⁵⁴ “FAQs,” BDS Movement.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Anita De Donato, “Water Politics.”

²⁵⁷ The document reads: “*refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.*” JIMENA claims Arab Jews also “stripped of their assets and forced to leave as penniless refugees [...] the resolution aimed to strategize for a peace process but was careful to use the generic term “*refugee*”—a “*just settlement to the refugee problem*”—and not “*Palestinian refugee*,” recognizing that “*two refugee populations were created as a result of the Middle East conflict: one of Jews from Arab countries and one of Palestinians.*”

This is when cries of antisemitism ring loudly. Why is the end to a Jewish state, to use Zionist discourse, "the *only* Jewish state," perceived as antisemitism? Deborah Lipstadt, the preeminent scholar in modern-day antisemitism, argues that before 1948, to oppose the creation of a Jewish state—a legitimate argument even within the Jewish community—was not antisemitic. The difference she perceives now is that there *is* a state, and to delegitimize that state today means, inevitably, the return of all those Israeli Jews to the diasporic condition of persecution.

*We're talking about a state with six million Jews in it. We're talking about a functioning, existing state. And to people who say, "Well, it shouldn't be there, it should be done away with, it should be eliminated"—first of all, on a practical level, where are these people going to go? Don't tell me about a Muslim state with a large Jewish minority, either a one-state solution or Jews going into a neighboring Muslim state, because there is no place that I look, certainly in the Arab world, and even in the non-Arab world, where you see states with religious minorities that live in safety and in peace and are thriving.*²⁵⁸

What Lipstadt presents is a description of the precariousness of antisemitism as it relates to anti-Zionism; it feels impossible to imagine the destruction of the State of Israel without the destruction of the People of Israel. That Palestinians today live with the inheritance of diaspora, refugee status, and the Israeli occupation, that is *fact*. That their experiences are silenced is traumatic and unacceptable. In regard to the ESMC dispute, however, the opposition is not nearly as much to the teaching of Israel-Palestine as it is to the connotations of doing so by excluding any Jewish history whatsoever.

Separate from claims that the BDS movement is itself antisemitic, because that is too broad and impossible a debate to tackle here, the ESMC's relationship to Israel-Palestine is a more discernable discussion. By discussing BDS and Israel-Palestine without Judaism or Jewish

²⁵⁸ Isaac Chotiner, "Looking at Anti-Semitism on the Left and Right: An Interview with Deborah E. Lipstadt," *New Yorker Magazine*, Jan 24, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/looking-at-anti-semitism-on-the-left-and-the-right-an-interview-with-deborah-e-lipstadt>.

history, the drafters of the ESMC are asserting a Jewish *disbelongingness* in Ethnic Studies vis-a-vis Palestinian *belongingness*. Thereby, the ESMC does not simply critique settler colonialism; it does so by both delegitimizing, on the whole, any historical claims of Jewish indigeneity to Israel-Palestine (through exclusion) and by ignoring a history of Jewish resistance to Zionism (especially Jewish American).

Colonialism and Zionism

It is often hypothesized that in 1947 the United Nation adopted the Partition Plan for Palestine in direct response to the Holocaust; while this may be true, the motives and understandings of the United Nations cannot be attributed to the motives nor the minds of Jews—anti-Zionist or Zionist. The Holocaust occurred roughly seventy years after the first widespread development of a political Zionism; and Zionism as a religio-philosophical concept began the moment Jews were first exiled by the Assyrians in 586 BCE, and again after some returned only to be exiled again by the Romans in 70 CE.

The Zionist movement as secular scholars discuss it today officially began in 1897, following the publication of Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* one year prior, at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. However, in 1882 a few small groups of European Jews—dispersed across the continent—had unofficially been promoting the settlement of Jews in agricultural colonies the Ottoman Palestine. Before even this grassroots infancy of Zionism, there were 5,000 Jews in Palestine 1517, about 2% of the total Palestinian population.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, still before modern Zionism, the 1878 Ottoman census reported roughly 400,000

²⁵⁹ Itamar Rabinovich and Juhuda Reinharz, *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 570.

Muslims, 45,000 Christians, and 25,000 Jews living in the territory of Palestine. At least 15,000 of those Jews were indigenous.²⁶⁰ British demographic counts did not begin until 1922, two decades into modern Zionism; by that year, Palestine had a population composed of roughly 590,000 Muslims (78.34%), 83,800 Jews (11.14%), and 71,500 Christians (9.50%).²⁶¹ These statistics are offered to refute the notion that Zionism held no meaning until European colonialism and the United Nations gave it one.

While for the United Nations the Holocaust may have been a climax in their relationship to the establishment of a Jewish state prior, for World Jewry, the Holocaust was a climax of the antisemitism that Zionism had created itself to escape; it was also a concept, “Zionism,” that reached far back in history—as the *tenet* of Jewish faith. In 1944, the American Council for Judaism argued against the United Nations establishment of a Jewish state out of “defeatism,” or pity. This would diminish the underlying philosophy of Zionism—that Jews are a historic nation and deserving of a homeland like all other nations--by treating the Jews only as legitimate of nationhood in reaction to the Holocaust would not suffice. They wrote,

*We oppose the effort to establish a national Jewish state in Palestine or anywhere else as a philosophy of defeatism and one which does not offer a practical solution of the Jewish problem. We believe that the intrusion of Jewish national statehood has been a deterrent in Palestine's ability to play an even greater role in offering a haven for the oppressed and that without insistence upon statehood, Palestine would today be harboring more refugees.*²⁶²

Furthermore, Zionism is an ideology far deeper than the discursive concept of “political Zionism” acknowledges. A people of exile, “Jerusalem” is not merely a physical place; the

²⁶⁰“Demographics of Historic Palestine Prior to 1948,” Factsheet Series No. 7, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, July 2004, accessed Jan. 20, 2020, https://www.cjpme.org/fs_007.

²⁶¹ Canadians for Social Justice and Peace in the Middle East, “Demographics of Historical Palestine Prior to 1948.”

²⁶² “A Statement of Policy,” American Council for Judaism, in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 412.

Jewish holiday of Passover once meant a festival of ritual animal sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem; since the moment of exile, the Passover seder has been a commemoration of the destruction of the Temple and the hope, the refrain: “Next year in Jerusalem!” Leslie Hoppe writes in *The Holy City: Jerusalem in the Theology of the Old Testament* (2000), “The centrality of Jerusalem to Judaism is so strong [...] Jerusalem is not sacred to Judaism because of shrine's celebrating Judaism's past. For Jews Jerusalem is sacred simply because it exists.”²⁶³ Jerusalem is as much a physical place as it is a figment of the soul; Zionism the belief, the hope, that a return meant the reunification not just of the Nation of Israel but of the *soul* of the Jewish people.

I do not propose that political Zionism is not a colonial project, nor that Palestinians are not indigenous to the land. However, in the most cited examples of colonialism, all parties share full certainty that the colonizers had, before “discovery,” never before stepped foot on the land; there is *no* dispute over indigeneity. I contend that treating Zionism as though it fits neatly into the same parameters as most other manifestations of European colonialism demonizes any sympathy for the expansive Jewish identity and history that understands Zionism through an entirely different structure than the liberal spaces of the Western academy. I aim to say, that a non-Jew can far more easily decontextualize the religious and cultural history of Zionism from its political associations today than can a Jew; that for a Jew to *delegitimize* Zionism they must believe that Jews are a people of exile, not those who don't have a home, but who do not need a home.

In order to better illustrate how Zionism may have diverged from other colonial projects of its time, we should look to those who wrote the philosophies. Nancy Shoemaker, a professor

²⁶³ Leslie Hoppe, *The Holy City: Jerusalem in the Theology of the Old Testament* (Minnesota: the Liturgical Press, 2000), 6.

of American and indigenous history, created a “list of colonialism distinguished mainly by colonizers’ motivation.”²⁶⁴ She presents twelve various forms, one of which I will discuss. Even the most prominently ascribed colonial form to Zionism, settler colonialism, has diverse implications. Shoemaker defines settler colonialism as, “Large numbers of settlers claim land and become the majority. Employing a “logic of elimination” [...] they attempt to engineer the disappearance of the original inhabitants everywhere except in nostalgia.”²⁶⁵ That there was a settlement project of Europeans in Palestine, that they were Jews, that their aim was land acquisition, and that it has led to a persisting state of crisis is accepted here as fact. Some Zionist writers of the early years, however, should challenge us to consider if the intent at the beginning really was to displace all non-Jews.

Vladimir Jabotinsky was perhaps the first opponent of the original political Zionist ideology (Labor Zionism) to successfully challenge the leadership enough to leave an imprint. Labor Zionists accepted the British quotas placed on Jewish settlement, which some have described as a request of the indigenous Palestinians to restrict Jewish settlement. Jabotinsky saw compliance with the British as a failure to prioritize the immediate growth of the population needed to attain a Jewish majority in the region. Jabotinsky’s “Revisionist” Zionism derived from his belief that the success of a Jewish country depended on gaining a demographic majority. Jabotinsky was the theorist from whom Rabbi Kahane and other revisionists drew their radicality; however, Jabotinsky himself still did not, at least in 1926, advocate territorial expansion at the cost of violence or expulsion. While Jabotinsky’s followers in Israel-Palestine

²⁶⁴ Nancy Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism,” *American Historical Association*, Oct. 1, 2015, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2015/a-typology-of-colonialism>.

²⁶⁵ Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism.”

became violent and militaristic and have poisoned the current policies today, in his early statements Jabotinsky made clear that violence against Palestinians in *any form* would prove antithetical to the success of Zionism. He wrote,

Our attitude toward the Palestinian Arabs is determined by the full recognition of an objective fact: even after the formation of a Jewish majority a considerable Arab population will always remain in Palestine. If things fare badly for this group of inhabitants then things will fare badly for the entire country. The political, economic and cultural welfare of the Arabs will thus always remain one of the main conditions for the well-being of the land of Israel. In the future Jewish state absolute equality will reign between residents of both peoples, both languages and all religions. All measures must be taken to develop the national autonomy of each of the peoples represented in the country with regard to communal affairs, education, cultural activities and political representation. We believe that in this way the Jewish people in Palestine will in the future be able to convince the Arabs inside and outside the country to reconcile themselves to [a Jewish majority] in the land of Israel.²⁶⁶

How important is it that Jabotinsky, who is remembered as the radical conservative Zionist of his time, stressed an obligation to “absolute equality” and “political, economic, and cultural welfare” for Palestinian Arabs as a pre-requisite for the essence of Zionism?

In 1944, the American Council for Judaism wrote a policy statement verbalizing a similar understanding of morality as integral to righteous autonomy. They wrote,

Palestine is a part of Israel's religious heritage as it is part of the heritage of two other religions in the world. We look forward to the ultimate establishment of a democratic autonomous government in Palestine wherein Jews Muslims and Christians shall be justly represented every man enjoying equal rights and sharing equal responsibilities. A democratic government in which our fellow Jews shall be free. Palestinians whose religion is Judaism even as we are Americans whose religion is Judaism.

Gaining a Jewish majority in Palestine, it seems, may not have been initially meant to exile all Palestinians. The point to be made here is that even as a colonial project, Zionism held fast to

²⁶⁶ Jabotinsky, “What the Zionist-Revisionists Want,” 464.

distinct intents. Many components of Zionism deserve immense criticism, but those criticisms should *truly* come from a distinction between colonialism as White Supremacy, as “civilizing” native peoples, as labor exploitation, and Zionism as the millennia-long idea of a return home.

Indigeneity and Zionism

Discussing the groups included in the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States, the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) provides: “many did not necessarily think of themselves primarily as Arab. They often identified as members of a particular religious group of geographic area: Christians, Muslims or Jews, from Lebanon, Aleppo, or Jerusalem.”²⁶⁷

Compared against the letter from Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews clearly stating an identity with their Arab heritage, this characterization of immigrants²⁶⁸ explicitly negates the “Arabness” of these groups by claiming, on their behalf, that they often “did not necessarily think of themselves primarily as Arabs.”²⁶⁹

The Palestinian historical memory asserts presence in the land farther back than the Jewish bible. On this, Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Muhammad Abbas has accentuated: “Our narrative says that we were in this land since before Abraham, I'm not saying it, the Bible says it. The Bible says it in these words that the Palestinians existed before Abraham, so why don't you recognize my right?”²⁷⁰ Henry Catan, a Palestinian jurist and writer, similarly portrayed, “Palestinians are the original and continuous inhabitants of Palestine from time

²⁶⁷ Instructional Quality Commission, “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” 241.

²⁶⁸ The only reference to Jews as an identity group in the entire ESMC; two other instances mention “Jew” only in the context of providing examples of stereotypes lobbied against Arab men-- “hate Jews and America”--or Palestinians-- “try to ‘destroy Israel’ and ‘drive the Jews into the sea,’” and the last, “ an immigrant Jew like Lionel Cohen” cited from A Patriot’s History of the United States: From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the War on Terror (2004).

²⁶⁹ Instructional Quality Commission, “California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,” 241.

²⁷⁰ Sandra Scham, *Extremism, Ancient and Modern: Insurgency, Terror and Empire in the Middle East* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 98.

immemorial.”²⁷¹ Furthermore, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chief Negotiator, Saeb Erekat, is quoted as saying at the 2014 Munich Security Conference: “I am the son of Jericho...The proud son of Natufians and the Canaanites. I've been there for five thousand five hundred years before Joshua Bin-Nun came and burned my hometown Jericho.”²⁷² It is no doubt that the land which is now called Israel-Palestine was inhabited by an entire population of people when modern political Zionist settlement began. Who was actually there in the biblical era, I cannot propose to answer.

Each position is founded in direct opposition to the other: Zionists must delegitimize Palestinian contemporary indigeneity who in turn must delegitimize Jewish historical indigeneity.²⁷³ The dominant Zionist discourse highlights the periods of movement throughout the history of the Middle East, but particularly of Arabs to historic Palestine after the fourteenth century. Describing these groups, the ideology maintains that communities in the tens of thousands migrated to land in more contemporary history, including the Ashiri under Gaza, the Mongols, and others. Regardless of how or when they made a home in Palestine, refugees from the Palestinian community in the era of mass Jewish settlement were directly displaced, chased, enclaved, or otherwise restricted by the events leading to and following the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Jewish claim to indigeneity is complicated and multifaceted; the terminology of a return to Jerusalem (*L'shanah Haba'ah*) has been documented in Jewish prayer services from before, at least, the fourteenth century.²⁷⁴ This return to Jerusalem was rooted in a desire not just

²⁷¹ *Arafat, Terrorist or Peacemaker?* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), p. 49.

²⁷² Elhanan Miller, “About That 10,000-Year History in Jericho,” *The Times of Israel*, Feb, 12, 2014, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/about-that-10000-year-history-in-jericho-mr-erekat/>.

²⁷³ While both of their histories were most likely of the same place and perhaps even people, I will mention.

²⁷⁴ This is the date they were first recorded in secular writing, but the phrase *Le 'shannah Haba 'ah* came earlier.

to return to the ancestral land of the Torah, but to actually *rebuild* Jerusalem, and in many ways, it still is. Jerusalem did not just mean a place, but the *soul* of the Jewish nation itself. When the idea of *L'shanah Haba'ah* first erected, while there were some Jews remaining in historic Palestine, most were exiled for centuries in unyielding diaspora and impossible assimilation. Returning to Jerusalem was not simply to a physical place, but a holy redemption through the reunification of the Nation of Israel and the rebuilding of the Second Temple. Zionism as a return home was invented millennia before the era of colonialism we now, understandably, associate it with, but the idea of rebuilding the nation--the land itself and the communal soul was far older than the intents of European colonialism.

I do not propose that there is even a way to measure indigeneity; rather that we should factor into our actions of solidarity the existence of competing claims—whether they seem legitimate or not. We should also recognize how assumptions of *Ashkenazi exemplariness* might be simplifying immense complexity. BDS is a meaningful and important movement that demands solidarity from anyone claiming to be progressive. What I am writing to explain is not a supersession of BDS with Jewish indigeneity; it is the manner by which solidarity with BDS in the form of a delegitimization of Zionism, when Zionism is defined along competing frameworks, has implications for Jewish allyship that require of liberal Jews far more than a denunciation of the current Israeli regime. While the ESMC excludes Jewish Studies because *Ashkenazi exemplariness* does not fit American Jews within the definition of communities of color, the curriculum's strong emphasis on BDS also suggests that Jewish history has been excluded by virtue of the depiction of Zionism through assumptions of *Ashkenazi exemplariness* as a purposefully violent, White Supremacist, colonial regime—perceived American Jewish

complicity in which is seen as directly antithetical to the experiences of communities included within Ethnic Studies.

CONCLUSION

Jewish inclusion or exclusion from the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) is far too fraught for either side of the discourse to truly understand the other. This is not because they don't want to or because they cannot. It is because the contemporary status of Jews in America is framed by both sides in a historical moment where there exists a Jewish state, transforming conceptions of antisemitism, and the implications of *Ashkenazi exemplariness*, a divide exists between the solidarity the American Jewish establishment perceives itself to have by virtue of Jewish history and the sentiment that allusions to that history in disputations will consistently override the activism of people of color. There is also a divide between liberal Jewish scholars and the Ethnic Studies community, despite stated separations of those Jews from an establishment of which they are highly critical. There are Jews, as there have always been, who show true solidarity and reject the establishment. But the fact that the American Jewish establishment perceives itself as it does, and is perceived by Ethnic Studies as such is a negotiation that should be confronted within both communities. The expectations placed on liberal Jews to denounce the basic tenet of Judaism that imagines exile only through indigeneity to a physical place presents an unfair barrier to Jews, particularly White Jews, who desire to show true solidarity.

The BDS movement imposes a boycott on Israeli academic institutions with the

precedent that these institutions have been active strategizes in the current occupation. In many ways, this is true. According to Ronit Lentin, an Israeli-Irish Jewish writer, Naftali Bennet, who is the Israeli Minister for Education, has recently “reprimand[ed] teachers who criticize the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)” and banned the novel of a Palestinian-Jewish love story in New York (*All the Rivers*) from Israeli secondary schools.²⁷⁵ Centrally, Bennet appointed a philosophy professor named Asa Kasher to draft the new guidelines for academic conduct in Israeli schools; Kasher also authored the IDF code of ethics.²⁷⁶

Advocates of the academic boycott stress that by nature of their employment, faculty at Israeli institutions are complicit in the occupation. However, Omar Barghouti, a co-founder of the BDS movement, responded when questioned about this same question regarding his own studies at an Israeli university in Tel Aviv that Palestinians, “cannot possibly observe the same boycott guidelines asked of internationals.”²⁷⁷ Furthermore, he argued that the indigenous Palestinians are entitled to any services they grasp from the system.²⁷⁸ Opponents of the academic boycott argue that while the boycott targets all higher education institutions in the State of Israel, it delineates based upon the criterion of national affiliation—“Israeli”—regardless of personal affiliation—personal politics.²⁷⁹ They believe the boycott targets individual academics at the faculty level and thereby prevents collaboration with international colleagues.

Furthermore, at the subjective level, they predict the individuals most silenced and restrained by

²⁷⁵ Ronit Lentin, “Race and Surveillance in the Settler Colony: The Case of Israeli Rule over Palestine,” *Palgrave Communications* 3 (2017): doi:10.1057/palcomms.2017.56

²⁷⁶ Lentin, “Race and Surveillance in the Settler Colony,” 2.

²⁷⁷ Daniel Sugarman, “BDS Co-Founder Omar Barghouti Fails to Secure U.K. Entry Visa in Time for Labour Conference Fringe,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, Sep. 20, 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/bds-movement-co-founder-omar-barghouti-unable-to-secure-uk-entry-visa-1.489016>.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Judith Butler, “Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom,” *Radical Philosophy*, 135 (January/February 2006): 8-17.

the boycott are members of the one cohort in any society most consistently willing to criticize the establishment (i.e. academics).²⁸⁰

The claim that left-leaning Israeli academics are targeted is challenged on two counts. First, it assumes that BDS has a specific list of institutions/faculty to boycott and guidelines of how the boycott should be imposed; BDS as a movement leaves interpretation for enforcement up to the participating institutions.²⁸¹ Second, it assumes that left-leaning Israeli academics oppose being boycotted. In “Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom,” Judith Butler provides evidence to the legitimacy of these claims, but she also depicts some left-leaning Jewish Israeli faculty in support of the boycott.²⁸² She writes concerning the assumption that BDS silences the Israeli academic left that the claim, “is perhaps ironic since many of the Israelis most vocal in their opposition to the Occupation, such as Ilan Pappé, were also those who were saying ‘boycott me!’”²⁸³ Additionally, Butler quotes the 2000 statement released by Palestinian cultural, academic and professional associations and unions, which stipulated that enforcement of the academic boycott should “exclude [...] any conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state’s colonial and racist policies.”²⁸⁴

When challenged on the issue of academic freedom, supporters of the boycott assert that it is the *lack* of academic freedom available to Palestinians that warrants the *limiting* of academic freedom for Jewish Israelis. Butler summarizes,

there is no effective academic freedom for Palestinian students in the occupied territories: students and faculty at institutions on the West Bank are regularly stopped at checkpoints and fail to get to class; they are often without fundamental material support

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Notably, it is not the Israeli academics who oppose the occupation that are most critical of the boycott, but rather those who disavow opposition to the occupation.

²⁸³ Butler, “Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom,” 9.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

for schooling, even lacking classrooms and basic supplies, and are subject to sudden

closures that make the idea of a completed 'semester' almost unthinkable. Indeed, substantive notions of freedom of 'movement' and freedom of 'communication' are systematically undermined under such conditions.²⁸⁵

In other words, academic freedom exists not as an inalienable right but as a privilege against physical freedom of movement and access.

If the very capacity to exercise rights of academic freedom, however, is undermined by these conditions [of occupation], then the inability to exercise a right constitutes a negation of the right in advance; in other words, these rights are, we might say, abrogated through foreclosure and pre-emption. They are not asserted and then restrained: rather, they have from the start no opportunity to be asserted. Or if they begin to be asserted, they are violently denied.²⁸⁶

By this framework, the academic boycott of Israeli institutions asserts that academic freedom is not allocated in Israel-Palestine as an abstract right but rather as a physical condition of unethically allocated material access to the opportunities of higher education through physical barriers to movement.

Posing a discussion on the successes of BDS, columnists at *Alma* write:

Israel's economy is thriving, and it is far from being isolated internationally. So BDS hasn't had much of an effect on Israel's bottom line, let alone brought any big political changes. But [...] BDS has become a big issue on certain college campuses. A few dozen student governments have passed divestment resolutions [...] The BDS movement has also won boycott pledges from a handful of academic associations and graduate student unions. [...] The movement may not have achieved its economic goals, but BDS has gotten the attention of Israel and alarmed Jewish organizations, who have made fighting the movement a major focus.

In fact, it is within the realm of liberal Western academic spaces that the BDS movement has

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

been most successful; and it is for this reason that American Jewish students and scholars are burdened by expectations to delegitimize the State of Israel and vehemently oppose Zionism even in spaces entirely unrelated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this regard, a particular requirement is placed on liberal Jews for solidarity.

Julia Métraux, in a personal essay on her experiences in an American college, voices frustration with the expectations placed on her as a Jewish student, *particularly* because of her Jewishness. She writes,

*It was the beginning of my freshman year of college, and I was at a social justice-themed orientation [...] I was the only one who said that I was Jewish, and therefore I was the only person who was asked about my stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [...] I was expected to announce my stance on the conflict if I wanted to be accepted in the group. I knew if people did not like what I had to say, I would be ostracized.*²⁸⁷

The impact of aggressive anti-Zionist sentiment on United States college campuses is that the most dominant success of the BDS academic boycott is felt by Jewish scholars outside of the State of Israel. The boycott transcends any depictions of Zionism as a purely political movement and imagines Jewish students and scholars themselves as the embodiment of the conflict. In a reflection on her experiences as a Jewish student at the University of California, Berkeley, “an infamously liberal university,” Bria Rosenberg discusses the “gatekeeping” of Jewish students, whereby student “groups, officially or unofficially, Zionist or anti-Zionist, [are] guilty of gatekeeping Jewish students based on their opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” especially “when it comes to social justice spaces.”²⁸⁸ She describes,

On many occasions, students at UC Berkeley have equated Judaism with Zionism, as if our entire religious identity is solely based on our relationship with Israel, and further

²⁸⁷ Julia Métraux, “Please Stop Expecting Jewish Students to Have an Opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” *Hey Alma*, Jan. 21, 2020, <https://www.heyalma.com/please-stop-expecting-jewish-students-to-have-an-opinion-on-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

*equate Zionism with white supremacy and settler colonialism, using these words synonymously [...] at a live-streamed student senate meeting in April [which] was about senate elections and had essentially nothing to do with Israel [...] one student claim[ed] that [...] if you don't call out your Zionist friends, you are "implicit in the oppression of Palestine and the oppression of settler colonized countries all across the world" as well as implicit in the "prison-industrial complex," "prison militarization," and "modern-day slavery."*²⁸⁹

From this statement at the senate meeting arose a myriad of other commentaries on the violence of Zionism, the complicity of Jewish students, and the need to hold everyone on campus accountable to denounce all forms of colonialism. Within such spaces, as well, Jewish students who do not immediately agree are suggested not to speak. In a personal essay, Bria Rosenberg contends to the silencing of Jewish students on Zionism:

*With all of the accusations she made, both about Israel and myself, I never got the chance to defend or explain myself. And to me, that is the root of the issue [...] Get to know me beyond what you assume my relation to Israel is, because if you let me speak, you'd know that I in fact do not support murder or White Supremacy. The fact that I even have to clarify that is beyond ridiculous.*²⁹⁰

In my own experience, during the time that I was first confronting the inconsistencies of my early education in Jewish day school, I became vocally opposed to Zionism. I wrote articles condemning the American Jewish establishment for purporting the erasure of Palestinians within its curricula, to which I was told my writing was too “radical” for even the most liberal Jewish news media sources to publish. I emailed community rabbis and the leaders of my previous Jewish schools, stressing the needs to better prepare Jewish students to truly, critically engage with the situation in Israel-Palestine. And yet, despite my own reckoning, my own activism, and my own very real emotional connection to the issue, a non-Jewish student

²⁸⁹ Bria Rosenberg, “What It’s Like to Be a Jewish Student at a Notoriously Anti-Israel College,” *Hey Alma*, June 26, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.heyalma.com/what-its-like-to-be-a-jewish-student-at-a-notoriously-anti-israel-college/>.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

at my college read one post I made on Instagram in which I briefly mentioned the conflict, and told me that my activism was “performative,” and entirely unwelcome.

My immense resentment towards the American Jewish establishment and my disappointment in a global Jewish community I once believed proactively committed to issues of social justice, coupled with a proportional resentment from the community I was trying to understand, led me to denounce Zionism entirely. My denunciation, like my criticisms, came entirely from the site of my Jewishness. I became convinced that Jews were not meant to have a homeland; that twentieth-century Zionists had acquired the land of Israel through cruel and immoral means, and that the current reality in Israel-Palestine served as proof that my community was unworthy of a physical nation.

My negotiation is not singular. In a statement given by a Jewish scholar who has dedicated her entire academic life to political activism and postcolonial theory, it is clear that true solidarity from a Jewish academic on the left allows little room for even the hope of a more just State of Israel without delegitimizing its existence.

I don't think there should be a Jewish homeland. I think the Jewish condition is to be in exile and the Torah is our homeland. I mean, I think that is Jewish history. And that should be the Jewish precedent. And so, on the one hand, you know, I don't think there should be a Jewish homeland, like an ethnostate. And so there is a part of me that I think does, then, hold Israel to a higher standard; because it's a community to which I'm internal.²⁹¹

For an American Jew to denounce Zionism to the extent that is required to authentically participate in the academic community which produced the ESMC, they must come to the *personal* belief, seeing members of their community conduct destruction, that Jews are meant to be in exile. This is the effect of BDS as represented through the Ethnic Studies Model

²⁹¹ Interview with Anonymous, Jan. 14, 2020.

Curriculum dispute; this is part of the harm imagined for Jewish students—teaching them to believe, as a whole, that World Jewry is complicit in the continuation of a mass oppression. Not just *an* oppression, but the most cited example on college campuses.

The widespread support for the BDS movement among the progressive spaces of the American academy—important support that should not as a whole be minimized—predominantly manifests in ways that treat anti-Zionism as the most significant qualifier of authentic allyship and ideological integrity of Jewish academics. Elena Gormley presents a description of antisemitism that applies to this dynamic.

Modern anti-Semitism is very much a conspiracy theory that labels Jewish people as the masterminds of whatever a community labels their greatest evil: whether that's the crucifixion of Christ, the death of children, the destruction of "the white race," communism, capitalism, pornography, imperialism, gentrification [or] police violence.²⁹²

Among the “greatest evils” of the liberal American academy are, arguably, two-fold: colonialism and White Supremacy. And Zionism, depicted as both, is treated as a conspiracy of the entire Jewish community to the extent that the first question asked of a Jewish students regards confirmation of politics on Zionism. This occurs without recognizing that the term itself, “Zionism,” has a history—cultural, theological, mystical, geographical, and, yes, *now* politico-social; and it occurs because Zionism is treated as such an extreme colonial regime that Jews are condemned on the basis of their Jewishness, requiring a statement evidencing one’s anti-Zionism in order to avoid condemnation.

The academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions and faculty has transferred onto the liberal Western academy under the guise of *Ashkenazi exemplariness* as a boycott not on the basis of Israeli nationality, but of Jewish religious identity. This dynamic thrives because

²⁹² Elena Gromley, “Anti-Semitism Isn’t a Symptom of Mental Illness,” *Hey Alma*, Jan. 6, 2020. <https://www.heyalma.com/anti-semitism-isnt-a-symptom-of-mental-illness/>.

Ashkenazi exemplariness allows for the assumption that Jews are White and therefore Zionism unequivocally White Supremacy and colonial. *Ashkenazi exemplariness* understood in this manner leads to the representations illustrated by the dispute over Jewish exclusion from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). Jewish Studies is seen as a separate entity un-encompassed, and in fact in direct opposition to, the pedagogy and discipline of Ethnic Studies.

***Epilogue:
Concluding Personal Thoughts***

In the Lower East Side of New York City, where most Jewish immigrants to the United States first settled, a number of western and eastern European immigrants, each upholding different relationships to and interpretations of assimilation, together negotiated the communal ground of Jewish socialism.²⁹³ This political and religious consciousness originated in eastern Europe as *Yiddishkeit*—literally “Jewishness” and, symbolically, “a Jewish way of life”—in the late 1800s. This Jewish Socialism “emphasized living a moral life developed in a communal, working-class, and decidedly leftist political direction.”²⁹⁴ *Yiddishkeit* was, first, the tradition of Ashkenazi Jews that manifested in response to the antisemitism of Russian capitalism, wherein they were “Frozen out of class mobility and social assimilation”; it, therefore, “contained a synergistic mixture of religious and secular emphasis on social justice that spoke to the Jews.”²⁹⁵ This ideology was not the mindset of all Jews. However, it was so widespread that just being a Jew in the United States in the early twentieth century, especially in New York, meant knowing about *Yiddishkeit*.²⁹⁶

Proponents emphasized social justice, a legacy which maintained prominence in the dominant American Jewish consciousness through, at least, the Civil Rights era, a time during

²⁹³ Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

which some Jews in the United States joined in the activism. They interpreted solidarity with communities of color as integral to their Jewish identities. In a private interview, Jane Anna Gordon reflected on the relationship between liberal Jewish scholars and Ethnic Studies programs, portraying,

*the irony is there have always been Jews in Ethnic Studies, there have always been Jews in African American Studies, there have always been Jews in Latinx studies and Native American Studies. And some of those Jews, it's because they're both Black and Jewish or Latinx and Jewish or Native and Jewish; but for some, it's just because they see the issues that those fields grapple with as expressions of their Jewish commitments.*²⁹⁷

In the 1960s, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously declared of his march from Selma to Montgomery walking beside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I felt like my legs were praying.”

While the majority of American Jews today remain politically Democratic voters, the changes since the 1960s have transformed the dominant American Jewish socio-political ideologies away from Jewish socialism, the priority for leftist politics and ally-ship ingrained in the consciousness of Jewishness, into the confluences of Zionism and antisemitism that predominantly characterize the establishment today.

I have refrained in this thesis from citing any Jewish religious texts, or Hebrew in general because I do not believe they belong in a secular argument. However, there is a meaningful connection from which to conclude this thesis. The film *Precious Knowledge* depicts an Ethnic Studies classroom beginning each day with the communal reciting of a poem by Luis Valdez, based on a Mayan precept. The joined voices of the students sound together:

*Tú eres mi otro yo. You are my other me. Si te hago daño a ti, If I do harm to you, Me hago daño a mi mismo. I do harm to myself. Si te amo y respeto, If I love and respect you, Me amo y respeto yo. I love and respect myself.*²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Interview with Jane Gordon, Jan. 14, 2020.

²⁹⁸ McGinnis and Fifer, *Precious Knowledge*.

In Mishna Pirkei Avot, a Judaic text, we read the commentators debate the meaning of Rabbi Hillel's belief when he asserted,

In ein ani li, If I am not for myself, *mi li*, Who will be for me? *Uk'sh'eani l'asmi*, And when I am for myself alone, *ma ani*, What am I? *Ve'im lo ach'shav*, And if not now, *imatai*, When?

The commentators, trying to decipher the scholar's meaning, wrote: "Hillel is not talking about conceit and arrogance, but discussing the ugliness of selfishness and self-centeredness. He is therefore saying, *Im ein ani li*—If when I do a favor to others, I do it altruistically and have no ulterior motives, and I do not calculate what will I ultimately gain from this, then *mi li*—Who can say anything negative about me? However, if when I do a favor for others *ani le'atzmi*—I think of my selfish interest and benefits and otherwise I will not act, then *ma ani*--what kind of person am I considered to be?—Someone of little worth."²⁹⁹

I will close with this point. Before 1948, and arguably before 1967, while to be an Ashkenazi Jew in the United States was still not comparable to the experiences of community of color groups, Jews marginalized based on Jewishness still maintained, more than American Ashkenazi Jews do today, an experimental remnant of the *Yiddishkeit* social consciousness. I have illustrated in this thesis that the circumstances changed.

I speak, here, directly to the American Jewish establishment, and to other White Jews who may need to hear: If the ESMC decides not to revise to include Jewish history in the final curriculum, that is unfortunate, that is painful; and yet it is entirely understandable. Yes, the

²⁹⁹ Nachshon Carmi, "Pirkei Avot 1: 14," *Sefaria*. Retrieved from <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/35125?lang=bi>.

validity of Jewish communal responses to the ESMC are valid, as are the immense issues with how Jewish identity is constructed by non-Jews in the writing of the curriculum. However, if we—Jews of any heritage, and particularly Ashkenazi Jews—expect others to show solidarity with us, or to include us willingly, we must recognize that voicing opposition on the grounds of antisemitism (legitimate or not), as has been done with the ESMC, knowing very likely these complaints with both be heard and likely appeased, is a privilege that other communities are still fighting to obtain. If we must battle against people of color for solidarity via inclusion in their curriculum by *finagling* into the debate on the arm of the American establishment, we use our own historical legitimacy to silence the needs of other communities. If Jewish solidarity comes from a drive for equality, and not conscious of equity, what kind of people are we? It might be frightening, yes, or bothersome, the manner by which Jewish experiences are occluded from the ESMC, but I suggest we follow a pretty esteemed guide: Allyship is altruistic, not conditional.

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