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SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

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Dear Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, Dr. Darling Hammond, and  
Instructional Quality Commission Members,

I served as legal counsel, strategic advisor and draft speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from 1960 until Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968. I was a close friend of Dr. King, and I maintained close relationships with many important figures of the Black Freedom Movement who have passed away, including James Baldwin, Fannie Lou Hamer, Lorraine Hansberry, and Malcolm X, and others who are surviving members of Dr. King's inner circle, including Harry Belafonte, Xernona Clayton and Andrew Young.

More than a decade ago, at the invitation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University to become a Scholar/Writer in Residence I moved from New York to Palo Alto, CA. I currently serve as founding Director of the Institute for Nonviolence and Social Justice at the University of San Francisco.

I write this letter to you with great dismay, and great concern for the perversion of history that is being perpetrated by the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). If this model curriculum is approved, it will inflict great harm of millions of students in our state.

It is a fact that the Black Freedom Movement of the 1950s and 1960s under Dr. King's leadership transformed our country, overthrowing a century of Jim Crow segregation and white supremacist terror throughout the former Confederate states.

This fact, which I had thought was well known to all educated persons, has been removed from the ESMC. This is morally unacceptable and renders the entire curriculum suspect.

Moreover, it appears that this omission was deliberate. For example, "Evolution of Black Political and Intellectual Thought" is limited to three examples "racial accommodationism, Black nationalism, and revolutionary intercommunalism," with the implication that the intellectual and moral basis for radical nonviolence advocated by Dr.

King, his colleagues at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the heroes of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, including John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette and Robert Moses, is unworthy of inclusion in this intellectual history.

Worse, the ESMC implies that the struggle for integration and voting rights, against segregation and disenfranchisement, should be understood, and condemned, as “racial accommodationism.” It would be immoral to base the Black Studies portion of the ESMC on such a blatant and reprehensible falsification of historical fact.

The ESMC encourages teachers to include discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement. I very strongly agree with this recommendation. However, the model curriculum profoundly disserves California students by omitting any reference to the historical lineage from the 20<sup>th</sup> century Black Freedom and Civil Rights movements to the Black Lives Matter movement of recent years, and by failing to explain the linkages between the struggle to address police violence against Black protestors in Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery Alabama, and throughout Mississippi, and the struggle to end police violence against Black people today.

Most offensive of all, the only external source provided to teachers as a reference guide in the Exhibit B, Sample Lesson 4 “#Black Lives Matter and Social Change” is an article (Jamillah Pitts “Bringing Black Lives Matter Into the Classroom,” *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, Summer 2017) that denigrates the struggle of Dr. King and the Black Freedom Movement of the 1950s and 1960s:

*Romanticizing the civil rights movement is a particular concern when it comes to what students have already learned. Prevailing narratives praise “respectable,” seemingly passive, docile, nonviolent black leaders as heroes while condemning louder, more militant tactics, such as those associated with the Black Panther Party and the leadership style of Malcolm X.*

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/bringing-black-lives-matter-into-the-classroom-part-ii>

This analysis promulgates defamatory falsehoods. There was nothing “passive” or “docile” about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Bob Moses or any of the leadership of the nonviolent movement for Black freedom and human rights in the United States. It is morally indecent and deeply offensive to learn that this distorted narrative is being held up by the State of California as a model for teachers of Black studies.

It is my understanding that the first draft of the ESMC is even more disturbing in its denigration of the tradition of militant nonviolence throughout the Black Freedom movement and its glorification of those who advocate black nationalism, and even violence, as role models for our students. It is also my understanding that nothing in the second draft explicitly rejects the offensive portions of the first.

I write in a plea for moral reasoning and decency, and for a respect for truth and accuracy in teaching the history of transformative social movements to our students.

There are too many martyrs who died in the liberation struggle of our people, including my beloved friend Martin King, for me to remain silent about this issue.

I ask that the ESMC be rejected unless and until changes are made to correct these falsehoods and distortions. Above all, I ask that teachers and students be referred directly to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as primary source documents for study and discussion, with particular attention to Dr. King's 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

Sincerely yours,

*Clarence B Jones*

Dr. Clarence B. Jones